



Ministry of Health



World Health
Organization

Representative Office
for Cambodia

**JOINT PRESS RELEASE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND
THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION IN CAMBODIA
ON COVID-19 OMICRON UPDATE**

**Omicron is circulating quickly without borders and passports across the globe:
be vigilant, and be prepared, so that there are no regrets**

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and the Cambodian community have successfully rolled out the COVID-19 vaccination campaign across the country: as of 7 December, 101.10% of the 10 million targeted population (people aged 18 years and over) has had at least one dose of the vaccine; 96.44% of adults, 95.22% for those aged 5 years and above, 100% of healthcare workers, and 99% of people aged 60 years and above were fully vaccinated. This is an enormous achievement; however, we cannot be complacent.

Since the first detected case of COVID-19 on 27 January 2020 until 7 December 2021, Cambodia has reported 120,300 cases and 2,971 deaths. Over 99% of Cambodia's total COVID-19 cases and all the deaths have been reported since February this year. The epidemic is not over yet, and we may still face a continuation of infection especially for new variants. It is crucial that the Cambodian community prepares for them now.

With the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant named Omicron, the world is cautious of another wave of COVID-19 transmission. The first known laboratory-confirmed case of Omicron was identified from a specimen collected on 9 November 2021 in South Africa, with the variant (B.1.1.529) first reported to WHO on 24 November. As of 7 December 2021, the Omicron variant has been confirmed in 57 countries.

MoH officials with the support of WHO are working to address this challenge and to see what impact this variant will have on existing COVID-19 tools and measures. While there is currently no evidence of Omicron here in Cambodia, learning from Delta's circulation, we anticipate that the virus could silently enter the country any day, it is just a matter of time.

"To slow the introduction of Omicron, risk-based measures at the international border are being implemented, but Omicron's arrival can happen at any time. Individuals, families, and communities must be vigilant, and must be prepared to prevent COVID-19 transmission regardless of variant, while we are learning our new normal by strictly implementing the 3 dos and 3 don'ts and by being fully vaccinated when our turn comes," said **H.E. Prof. Mam Bunheng**, Minister of Health and Chair of Inter-ministerial Committee to Combat COVID-19. It is very hard to eradicate the COVID-19 virus and even harder to stop its transmission if people do not strictly apply all necessary preventive measures.

Omicron has been designated as a variant of concern (VoC) because it has multiple mutations that may have an impact on how it behaves. We need rapid research to understand this. At the same time, we

must not forget that we are already dealing with a highly transmissible, dangerous variant – the Delta variant - which still accounts for almost all cases globally. A new variant doesn't mean that things will necessarily be worse, but it does mean that they will be more uncertain. We need to be patient while the data comes in. In the meantime, we can act on what we know.

“We must be ready for a surge, and we must be prepared to respond quickly,” said WHO Representative to Cambodia, **Dr Li Ailan**, “while we are facing many uncertainties, Omicron provides us with an opportunity to further strengthen our public health and healthcare systems; preparing for COVID-19 surges will help us to avoid the red line - when healthcare systems are overwhelmed - and to protect the vulnerable. These measures will help us to continue a safe and sustainable reopening.”

We do not yet know whether infection with Omicron causes more severe disease compared to other COVID-19 variants. We do not yet know if there will be an impact on vaccine effectiveness. But we do know Omicron is highly transmissible. We do know that our current individual and public health measures have worked against previous variants, including Delta, and they work against Omicron too. The WHO will continue to support research on Omicron to bring more information on this new COVID-19 variant.

“In Cambodia, the 3 dos and 3 don'ts plus COVID-19 vaccination are effective, and remain our strongest defense against COVID-19, including against Delta and Omicron, and to protect the vulnerable if they are implemented correctly and regularly. Therefore, individuals, families and communities must continue to wear masks, physically distance, avoid crowds, increase ventilation and promote hand hygiene. We need to remain vigilant against COVID-19, protect the vulnerable, and prepare for future surges. We must act now: ‘Together Be Responsible to STOP COVID-19 Transmission’. Your health is your top priority, only you can prevent COVID-19 transmission, only you, your family and your community can stop the spread of the virus,” said **H.E. Dr. Or Vandine**, Secretary of State and Spokesperson of the MoH and Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee for Rolling Out the COVID-19 Vaccination Throughput the Country (ACC-19).

We also know that the widely used PCR tests continue to detect Omicron infection. This is important for monitoring the spread of COVID-19 in the community, and for implementing risk-based measures at the international border. From what we know so far, it appears the people who have already had COVID-19 can be re-infected by Omicron and other variants, so it is important that everyone remains vigilant, and continues with personal and communal preventive measures to mitigate the spread of this virus.

Even with our best efforts, globally, COVID-19 will not disappear soon. We must learn to live with it. While we continue to rollout vaccinations to reach the unreached and to complete the full recommended vaccination doses, strengthen early detection and surveillance systems, and implement calibrated and targeted public health and social measures, we still need to prepare for any possible surges in cases in the future, make sure health systems are well-prepared to handle them, and minimize the health, economic and social disruptions they cause. We must continue to implement our preventive measures in order to sustain our ‘new normal’ life.

If you have any health problems or related questions, please contact the hotline of the Ministry of Health 115 or by telephone number 012-488-981 or 012-836-868, and contact number of WHO Country Office in Cambodia is 023-216-610.



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