

## Lao People's Democratic Republic



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Total population (2005) <sup>1</sup>	5 621 000
% Under 15 (2005) <sup>1</sup>	39%
Life expectancy at birth – males (years) (2005) <sup>2</sup>	59
Life expectancy at birth - females (years) (2005) <sup>2</sup>	61
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (2005) <sup>2</sup>	70
Under five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) (2005) <sup>2</sup>	98
1-year-olds with 3 doses of Diphtheria-Pertussis-Tetanus vaccine (%) (2007) <sup>3</sup>	50%
Measles vaccination coverage at one year (2007) <sup>3</sup>	40
Children under five years stunted for age (%) (2006) <sup>3</sup>	40.4%
Antenatal care coverage – at least one visit (%) (2005) <sup>3</sup>	26%
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%) (2005) <sup>4</sup>	18.5%
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) (2005) <sup>2</sup>	405
Prevalence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 population) (2005) <sup>5</sup>	306
Prevalence of HIV (% of population) (2005) <sup>5</sup>	0.2%
Access to improved drinking water sources (% of population, total/urban/rural) (2006) <sup>6</sup>	62.6% / 86% / 53%
Access to adequate sanitation (% of population, total / urban / rural) (2006) <sup>6</sup>	51.8/ 86.7/ 38.2
Government expenditure on health as a % GDP (2007) <sup>7</sup>	0.6%
Population living below US\$1/day poverty line (%) (2003) <sup>8</sup>	34%
School enrolment, primary/secondary/tertiary (% gross) (2008) <sup>9</sup>	121.2 / 59.2 / 1.6

Sources: Please see next page

Lao PDR has been undergoing momentous social and economic transformations since the introduction of market-based economic reforms in 1986. These changes have significantly improved the nation's health status and health development. Lying inland of Cambodia and Vietnam, Lao PDR shares borders with these two countries, as well as with China, Myanmar and Thailand. Such geographic proximity generates significant connection and influence between these countries on health matters, including cross-border disease transmission and movement of people to obtain treatment in a neighboring country. Despite its status as a low-income country, with 35% of its ca. 6 million people living below the poverty line, Lao PDR has made significant progress in socio-economic development that has increased life expectancy and decreased infant mortality. Nonetheless, the health status remains one of the lowest in the WHO Western Pacific Region. The relatively poor health infrastructure and inaccessible terrain in the poorest parts of the country pose significant challenges to effective health services delivery. The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy adopted by the Lao Government in 2005, focuses on achieving a goal of “liberating the country from the status of a least-developed country” by 2020. The fundamental objective of the government's health strategy is equality in access to health care thus contributing to poverty reduction.

## HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT

**Health systems development.** Despite the market-oriented growth that takes place in the country, the Ministry of Health remains virtually the only provider of health and is strongly administrative. A few semi-government mass organizations and a range of international non-governmental organizations play an increasingly important role in the health sector. Utilization of many rural health facilities remains low. The shortage and unequal distribution as well as the poor qualifications and motivation of many staff in the health sector remain critical issues. The health sector is governed by several policies and four laws including the Law on Health Care of 2005. Priority areas in the current national health strategy include primary health care, maternal child health, health systems development, and aid effectiveness and coordination.

**Communicable disease** remains the most significant cause of morbidity and mortality in Lao PDR. Widespread poverty, lack of proper sanitation and water supply, malnutrition, poor health awareness and lack of good hygiene habits, all in the context of inadequate access to quality health care, promote the spread of communicable diseases in Lao PDR. **Non-communicable disease and injuries** are on the increase in Lao PDR and pose a major challenge to an already stressed health system. Tobacco and alcohol-related illnesses, illicit drug use and related crimes and road traffic-related injuries reflect the changing lifestyles of the people of Laos. Lao PDR needs to further strengthen its public health surveillance and response system and capacity and be prepared for early detection and rapid response to any kind of **emerging disease**, including cross-border transmissions and other public health events. **Neglected tropical diseases**, namely soil-transmitted helminthiasis, food-borne trematode infection, schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis are important public health problems in Lao PDR. The incidence of dengue has increased significantly in the last decade and is now a major public health issue in the country. Laos is a low **HIV** prevalence country; however, the disease is on the increase, and chlamydia and gonorrhoea are common in sex workers. There is a need to increase awareness of safer sex practices. The incidence of **tuberculosis** has slightly decreased between 2003 and 2007. The incidence of **malaria** has decreased between 2001 and 2006 but an influx of immigrants to Lao PDR raises the risk of introducing resistant strains. Surveillance must be intensified. Lao PDR's **maternal and child health** status is a pressing issue, with still high maternal mortality and relatively high child and infant mortality rates despite some recent improvements.

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm commitment of Lao PDR to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.</li> <li>The Lao Government, in collaboration with its development partners, has formulated and made significant efforts to draft, approve and implement a number of strategies in order to address key issues of health development in the country.</li> <li>Social protection schemes have been initiated.</li> <li>Maternal, neonatal and child health integrated package being implemented in selected districts.</li> <li>Progress on key objectives for event-based surveillance, indicator-based surveillance and rapid response systems is encouraging.</li> <li>Public health care infrastructure has expanded significantly over recent years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government's commitment to gradually lessen high dependency on official development assistance has yet to be matched by investing more in health.</li> <li>The relatively poor service quality and access barriers in the poorest parts of the country pose challenges to effective health services delivery. Consequently the utilization of public health facilities remains low.</li> <li>Equal access to quality health care, particularly by the poor and vulnerable groups, will remain difficult if not unachievable under present conditions due to high out-of-pocket spending.</li> <li>Current investment to address the future burden of non-communicable diseases, injuries and mental health is still minimal.</li> </ul>

## PARTNERS

WHO's main partner is the Ministry of Health. WHO also partners with numerous international development partners in Lao PDR, including the Asian Development Bank, Australia, European Commission, France, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, Luxembourg, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USAID and the World Bank. Key areas for cooperation include health sector development, infectious disease surveillance and response, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and reproductive health, immunizations and vaccines, child and adolescent health, noncommunicable diseases, injury prevention, healthy markets, and environmental health. WHO also works closely with nongovernmental organizations and civil society through mass organizations.

- Supporting Lao PDR towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Millennium Declaration provides an important organizing framework for health partner coordination in Lao PDR. The majority of donors in Lao PDR have reflected this framework in country assistance plans. A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper exists in Lao PDR in form of a 20-year National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES 2000) broken down into five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plans (NSEDPP). Corresponding to the NSEDPPs, there are five-year National Health Sector Development Plans with increasing involvement of development partners both in formulation and in review. A health sector-wide coordination (SWC) mechanism has recently gained momentum to ensure regular sector coordination at policy, operational, technical and task force levels.
- Since 2007, the Vientiane Declaration, a Lao-specific version of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and its associated Country Action Plan are offering a framework for monitoring progress in ownership, alignment and harmonization in key development sectors. The Vientiane Declaration is coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and Investment in close liaison with ministries and development partners.
- The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2007-2011 and the preceding Common Country Assessment (CCA) of 2006 place the MDGs at the center of the UN's work and seeks to provide a framework for coordinated UN assistance in Lao PDR.

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aid effectiveness in health is improving through a strong Sector Wide Coordination Mechanism with several technical working groups and joint programs playing an essential role in alignment and harmonization.</li> <li>• Consequently, collaboration among relevant agencies is developing more holistic and integrated approaches toward better health outcomes.</li> <li>• Dialogue and consultation on health between the government of Lao PDR and international stakeholders has led to the drafting and publication of several important policy and strategic documents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aid levels are expected to decrease in 2010 and 2011; a longer-term general trend toward declining aid however is anticipated.</li> <li>• International collaboration is necessary to prevent and control infectious diseases, strengthen PHC service delivery and other health system building blocks, address environmental health issues, and regulate food product and drug safety.</li> <li>• Support is needed for appropriate alternatives or exit strategies in health sector areas where donors will discontinue funding.</li> </ul>

## WHO STRATEGIC AGENDA (2009 – 2011)

1. Achievement of health related Millennium Development Goals (MDG)
  - MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger focusing on malnutrition
  - MDG 4: Reduce child mortality
  - MDG 5: Improve maternal health
  - MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
  - MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
2. Enhancing prevention, surveillance and control of communicable diseases including emerging public health threats
3. Increasing access to basic health care and reducing health inequities through health system development and promotion of aid effectiveness
4. Addressing health risk factors to reduce non-communicable disease, mental illness and injuries



Sources:

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2. World Health Organization. Western Pacific Regional Health Data Bank - 2008 Revision. Country Health Information Profile – Lao People's Democratic Republic. Manila, 2008.
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5. Mid-term Review of the 6th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP) of the Lao PDR 2006-2010. Ministry of Health, Lao PDR, 2008.
6. Joint Monitoring Programme, Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Assessment 2006. Ministry of Health, Lao PDR, 2006.
7. World Bank. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/LAOPRD/Resources/293582-1096519010070/534072-1229571730280/LaoEconomicMonitor\\_Nov2008\\_final.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INT/LAOPRD/Resources/293582-1096519010070/534072-1229571730280/LaoEconomicMonitor_Nov2008_final.pdf) (p15).
8. Committee for Planning and Investment, Government of Lao PDR. National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010. Vientiane, October 2006.
9. School Statistics. Vientiane, Ministry of Education, Lao PDR, 2008.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

WHO Western Pacific Region Country Health Information Profile <http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/2009/lao/>

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