

Health chief calls for more publicity around eye health services



Dr Phayvanh Keopaseuth speaks at an event to mark World Sight Day.

Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth

A top health official has stressed the need to spread the message about eye health care in rural areas, so that more people get the treatment they need for vision problems.

Deputy Minister of Health Dr Phayvanh Keopaseuth highlighted the importance of eye health and good vision when speaking at a Run/Walk in Vientiane to mark World Sight Day last week.

"We need to improve publicity around health services and the treatment that is available for people with vision problems because at present the amount of information that is circulated is limited," he said.

"We call on all health professionals to encourage people to prioritise eye

health, to ensure that eye care is accessible, inclusive and affordable to everyone, everywhere. We also call on our global partners and members to show the world how important this is, through #LoveYourEyes."

"From pledging to help reach our five million sight test goal to asking your networks and ambassadors to post selfies in #LoveYourEyes heart glasses, you are reminding everyone to take care of their eyes," Dr Phayvanh said.

According to the National Ophthalmology Centre, a recent survey estimated that 3 percent of Lao people aged 50 and over are blind. This prevalence level contrasts with that of a developed country such as Australia, where the number is less than 1 percent.

The overall incidence rate among populations in Asean member countries is 0.1 percent.

Primarily, blindness in Laos is caused by cataracts, while poor vision is caused by uncorrected refractive errors.

Cataracts are mostly found in the elderly, while others occur because of eye injuries, diabetes and genetic defects. But the condition can easily be treated, according to the World Health Organisation.

The prevalence of blindness is estimated to be as high as 5 percent in some rural or remote areas of the country.

Women account for up to twice as many cases of blindness as men. Besides the impact of vision loss on a person's quality of life, there is also a substantial economic loss associated with blindness, including increased unemployment, decreased productivity, and increased welfare costs.

Preventable blindness is a significant global health problem, which hinders development and disproportionately impacts the poor, yet many cases can be prevented or treated.

The World Health Organisation's World Report on Vision and the UN Resolution on Vision have cemented eye health as critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.



Specialists in the field of mental health meet for a training session at Mahosot Hospital.

Mental health medics get lessons in patient treatment

Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth

Professionals from the Mental Health Unit at Mahosot Hospital are attending a training session delivered by the Swiss Laos Hospital Project on ways to treat people suffering with various mental disorders.

The field of mental health is grossly understaffed in Laos and this area of medicine is poorly understood by health professionals.

The majority of Lao people with mental health issues do not have access to treatment, while the government lacks essential staff and funding to assist people with this kind of disability.

Speaking at the second training session for mental health professionals on Monday, the Director General of Mahosot Hospital, Dr Souxath Vongphachanh, said the training aimed to increase staff's understanding of mental health issues.

In addition, the possibility of future collaboration at the postgraduate level concerning the training of Lao physicians and staff from the Non-

Communicable Diseases Department of the Ministry of Health will be considered, along with bedside teaching and theoretical lessons for the staff of the Mahosot Mental Health Unit.

Dr Souxath said the trainees have improved their basic knowledge and clinical skills around the alleviation of psychological and social disorders.

With regard to social disorder alleviation, the training focused on regional communities and family and social networks because these are some of the main factors considered when treating mental health patients.

The hospital hopes that the trainees will gain more understanding of mental health treatment in communities and will be able to communicate and also listen to better ascertain the mental and physical health of their patients.

"We handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood," Dr Souxath said.

Mental health includes our emotional,

psychological, and social well-being, and affects how we think, feel, and act, he added.

A senior official from the Ministry of Health said the government encourages secondary school leavers to take courses at the University of Health Sciences, but this is not a popular choice.

In the future, the ministry will encourage more students to enrol in mental health courses at the university, while more government funding will be sought for this work, he said.

The first mental health training project under the Swiss Laos Hospital Project took place in 2019 to improve psychiatric expertise through practical and theoretical training for professionals from the Mental Health Unit at Mahosot Hospital as well as colleagues from other areas.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health invited the Swiss Laos Hospital Project to submit proposals for collaboration in the field of mental health, thereby contributing to the World Health Organisation's Sustainable Development Goals in this area.

Another death from dengue brings total to 22

Times Reporters

Another person has died from dengue fever, with the death recorded in Vientiane's Xaythany district, the Centre of Information and Education for Health reported on Tuesday.

The latest victim was a 35-year-old man from Oudomphon village.

Twenty-two people are now known to have died from the virus in Laos this year, which is higher than the annual average.

In Vientiane, six people have reportedly died from dengue, six in Attapeu province, three each in Luang Namtha and Saravan provinces, two in Xieng Khuang province, and one each in Xekong and

Oudomxay provinces.

So far, 28,658 cases of dengue have been reported across Laos this year.

Health authorities have instructed local residents to be more diligent in clearing mosquito breeding grounds, while health workers in every province are regularly advising people about the dangers of dengue fever and explaining ways to protect themselves against the virus.

The Centre for Malariology, Parasitology and Entomology advises people to remove any water that has collected in places such as water coolers and unused tyres, to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

People are also advised to close or seal unused

containers, flush out all forms of water vessels, and put small guppy fish in open water jars because these fish eat mosquito larvae.

Other advice is to clear weeds and long grass from around houses, and to make regular checks to ensure that no water has collected in low-lying spots or empty containers.

According to the Ministry of Health, these measures are the most effective methods of dengue control and should be practised by all households.

Last month, health authorities announced the rollout of an experimental project aimed at reducing the population of Aedes aegypti, the species of mosquito that transmits dengue fever.

Money exchange units... FROM PAGE 1

restrictions on currency exchange units, allowing them to change money only for individuals and tourists, up to a maximum of 15 million kip per person per

day. Money changers are banned from trading in foreign currencies with organisations and companies. Currently,

only commercial banks are authorised to buy and sell foreign currencies with importers, exporters, investors and other legal entities.

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