COVID Update and Plans for 2021-2022 Academic Year

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Mark A. Ritchie, Ph.D., Executive Director, ISDSI — isdsi.org
Context and Background

• Thailand had the first documented case outside of China of COVID-19

• ISDSI staff with relevant training and experience in public health, epidemiology, and risk assessment, with long history working with NGOs and communities

• Immediately started talking with Thai Public Health and others, gathering data and hosting public forums with Public Health and community

• Thailand went into lockdown, rural villages cut themselves off from the outside, extensive COVID control measures, including domestic travel restrictions

• Students were recalled home and we went online in March 2020 to finish the semester, cancelled all summer programs

• Put most staff on furlough, and formed a core “reboot” team to prepare to reopen if possible, based on planning from 3 years ago about pandemic preparedness
How we ran Fall 2020 / Spring 2021

- **Numbers fell** to zero in Thailand after an extensive lockdown for months

- **A partner school contacted us** as well as a couple of students about possibly running Fall 2020

- **Called together the “reboot team”** and started planning along with US staff

- **Fall 2020: 6 students / Spring 2021: 16 students** (including launching a new program)

- **Worked closely with Thai Public Health and local communities** to plan COVID safe experiential studies, including testing, quarantine, modifying activities, etc.

- Dropped home stays in urban areas, modified in rural areas, **involving our partner communities in the decision making process**

- We **figured out the VERY complex process of entry into Thailand** with constantly changing visas, quarantine requirements, Certificates of Entry, new insurance requirements, and flights
Strategy and ongoing assessment

- **COVID is a moving target** and requires assessing how and when to run programs

- Thailand has had two additional waves, with the “3rd wave” still ongoing, but concentrated around Bangkok, with smaller numbers or zero in other provinces — **geography matters!**

- **Continued to engage** with and dialog with Public Health, NGOs, epidemiologists and our own assessments

- **Increased orientation and dialog** with incoming students and partner schools

- Planning for Fall 2021 includes **multiple scenarios** with vaccinated students, increasing vaccinations in Thailand, challenge of controlling COVID in country, changes in sending school COVID policies
Things that helped us

• Most of our course are already experiential and field based so we could quickly modify programs and courses while being COVID safe

• Staff with relevant experience in social science, epidemiology, public health, and risk management

• Existing relationships to experts in public health, etc.

• Previous planning (3 years ago!) identified a pandemic as a risk in our SWOT analysis

• Ability to cross-check data from the Thai government to see if the numbers were reliable

• Two staff on furlough worked on COVID-19 testing locally in Chiang Mai and learned the system and who the key players are

• One American staff member stranded in the US helped figure out the very complex process of returning, and accompanied students back

• Thailand has an excellent public health and village health volunteer system, and Thai people are on-board with efforts to control COVID, including masking, social distancing, etc., along with daily briefings
Current situation and Fall 2021

- As of June 7 Thailand is CDC Level 3. **Northern Thailand would be Level 1** if calculated separately.

- **Vaccinations rolling out** across Chiang Mai and all ISDSI staff will be vaccinated.

- Anticipate all **incoming students will be vaccinated** by Fall 2021.

- Entry requirements are still challenging but **quarantine may get easier** before Fall for vaccinated travelers. Thailand is planning to eliminate quarantine for vaccinated travelers by January 2022.

- **All courses will be able to be offered**, modified for COVID and based on both provincial and community concerns / regulations.

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**Northern Thailand estimated at CDC level 1:**
Cumulative cases over 28 days below 5 per 100,000 population (May 7-June 5 = 4.39) and in decline.

Population of Northern Thailand : 6,350,499
Program Changes and COVID

• All courses and academic objectives can be done in a COVID safe manner.

• Following Chiang Mai Public Health directives, ISDSI campus requires temperature screening on entry, masks on campus, modifying classrooms as directed.

• Students will be required to register for track/trace with Thai national and Chiang Mai provincial apps.

• Students will be required to follow all Thai government regulations regarding COVID (e.g. universal mask wearing in public, check in/out at malls and restaurants, etc.).

• Housing in single occupancy rooms near campus.

• No home stays in urban areas, village home stays on a case by case basis. We will have Thai families in the city “adopt” students for the weekends.

• Travel to other provinces depends on rates of COVID as well as directions by Chiang Mai Public Health.