

Open Forum on Developing Risk Mitigation II

Forum on Education Abroad
2021 Online Webinar



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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

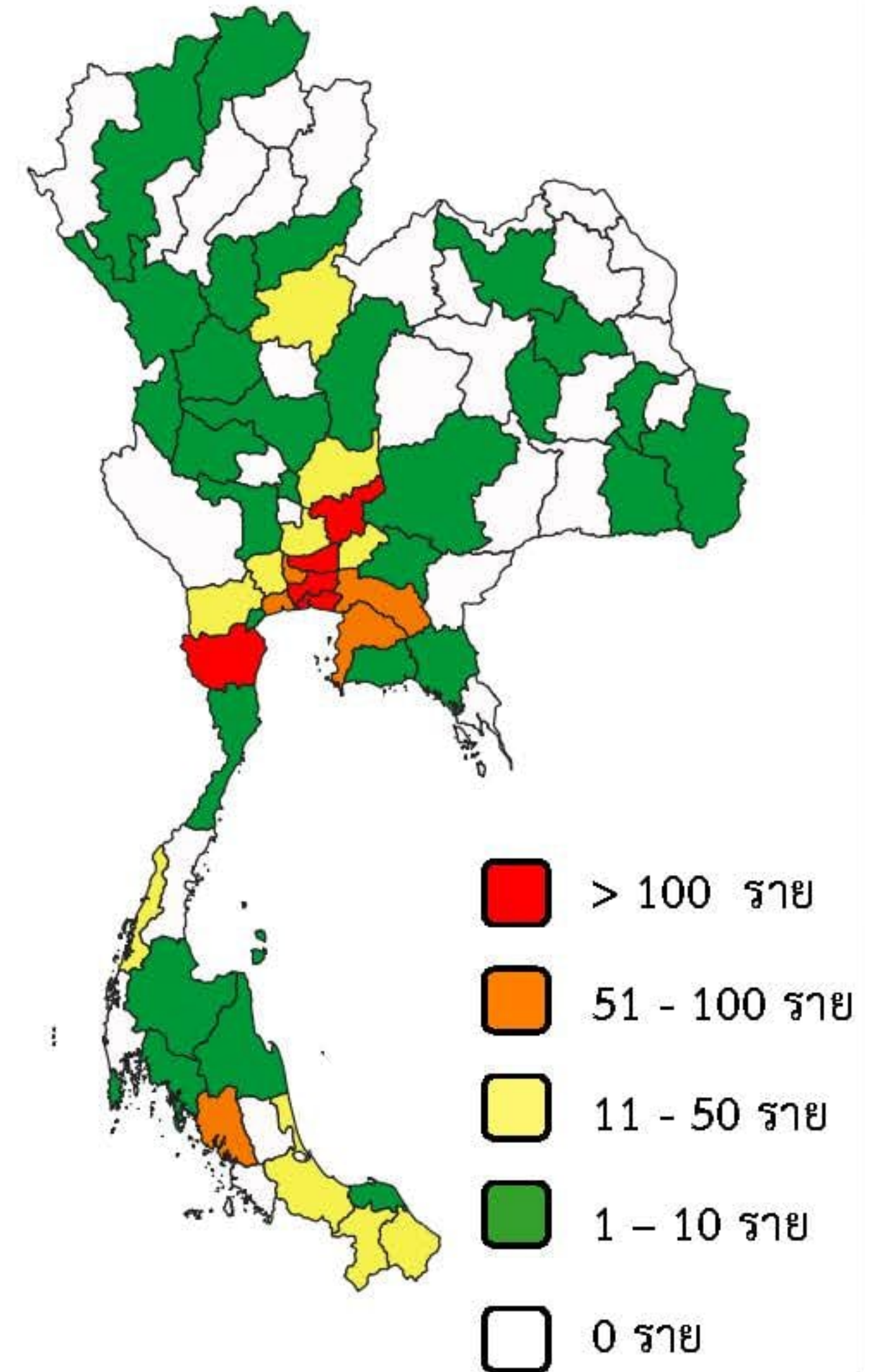
How we ran Fall 2020 / Spring 2021

- **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 **figured 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

