

Cambodia's position paper on the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination

Executive Summary

COVID-19 impacted social welfare and the lives of people globally, particularly disadvantaged groups. During the pandemic, poor communities and marginalized people lost income and job opportunities, and thousands of people faced these critical challenges.

As in many other countries, Cambodia also suffered from the pandemic, especially when COVID-19 first started to transmit in the communities. The royal government of Cambodia (RGC) imposed precautionary measures, including wearing masks, cleaning hands, keeping social distancing, and public and physical gatherings restrictions. During the second community outbreak, RGC released lockdown orders in certain areas in Phnom Penh and also restricted travelling across the province in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Between February to December 2021, the number of infection cases of COVID-19 increased to 120,423 and dead cases reached 3,005 people. During that period, many factories in the garment & footwear sectors temporarily suspended their operations; the restaurants were closed; and the tourism related-business have been forced to close. Therefore, approximately 390,000–570,000 jobs have been lost.

In May 2021, the Supreme National Economic Council of the Cambodian government released a Strategic Plan for the National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign to establish socio-economic immunity in Cambodia, aimed at creating community immunity throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia. RGC realized that the vaccine is the strategic measure to tackle COVID-19. And, RGC kicked off its vaccination campaign in early February 2021 by starting to focus on high-risk groups, including health workers, police/military officers, and civil servants. On 5 March 2021, furthermore, the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Cambodia released a statement on providing AstraZeneca (Covishield through the COVAX program) to prioritize citizens for vaccination, especially the older people who are living in high-risk areas. Vaccines are available and provided to all Cambodian citizens and foreign nationals in Cambodia free of charge. From February 2021 – August 2022, 94.76% of Cambodian citizens compared with the 16 million population are fully vaccinated. Both donations and purchased COVID-19 vaccines which have been distributed to Cambodia are sufficient to provide to all Cambodian citizens. By August 2022, the statistics of the MoH showed that 15,161,027 people of all ages had received at least one of the two basic doses. Currently, RGC is continuing to provide the 4th and 5th doses of vaccines to Cambodian people and foreign nationals nationally.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 vaccination distribution to the population is highly effective, including vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, people with disabilities, women and children in remote areas. According to the recent definition of the poverty line, the national poverty line in Cambodia is about 18 % of the total population. The highest poverty rate is in rural areas, at approximately 22.8 %. Therefore, rural and indigenous communities are more vulnerable caused by COVID-19 in terms of health care and income loss. Based on the above-mentioned challenges, Free and Universal Vaccination is very significant for Cambodia as well as other least or developing countries globally because vaccines are among the greatest advances in global health and development.

COVID-19 Situation

After COVID-19 was discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the government of Cambodia did impose immediate measures to prevent the spread of the virus and disease. Furthermore, the government had no restrictions on flight operations between Cambodia and China as well as with other countries in the region. During the first two months of the pandemic, the Cambodian government hasn't imposed any urgent measures to respond to the pandemic.

On 27 January 2020, the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Cambodia confirmed with the World Health Organization (WHO) that the first case of Coronavirus had been found in the country. The case is a 60-year-old man in Preah Sihanouk province who returned to Cambodia on a direct flight from Wuhan, China on 23 January¹. Since then, Cambodia had only confirmed the imported cases; until November 2020, Cambodia confirmed its first community transmission cases of COVID-19. During that period, the government started to impose restrictions on public and physical gatherings, including closing schools and religious and traditional ceremonies. Following the general measure of the WHO, the MoH of Cambodia also released precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including wearing masks, cleaning hands, and keeping social distance.

In order to respond and curb the spread of COVID-19 in Cambodia, MoH of Cambodia adopted the following measures:

- MoH hotline 115 for providing consultation and advice for those who are suspected of getting an infection of the virus;
- Prepare the Laboratory for collecting the swabs for COVID-19 testing at Institute Pasteur Cambodia, National Institute of Public Health (NIPH);
- Prepare the hospital for COVID-19 treatment in Phnom Penh and other provinces, including Khmer-Soviet, Phnom Penh; Siem Reap Hospital; Sihanoukville Hospital; Kampong Cham Hospital; Kampot Hospital; Strung Treng Hospital;
- Equip thermo-scanners established at three major airports and ground borders in Bavet Svay Reang Province, Prek Chak Kampot Province and Poy Pet Banteay Mean Chey Province;
- Train medical staff on how to respond to the COVID-19 and recruit medical volunteers to work at the COVID-19 treatment centres;
- Public education and awareness on Facebook, Television, radio, and banner & posters in public spaces.

The various waves of COVID-19 have continued to transmit across the country, especially in the capital city, Phnom Penh. The hospitalized and dead cases have increased from February 2021 after the second community outbreak of COVID-19. After a year of the global pandemic, Cambodia confirmed the first death case caused by COVID-19 in March 2021. During the period of 10 months between February-December 2021, official infection cases increased to 120,423 and the dead cases reached 3,005 people². By 22

¹ <https://www.who.int/cambodia/news/detail/28-01-2020-ministry-of-health-responds-to-first-positive-case-of-new-coronavirus>

² www.khmertimeskh.com

August 2022, the total number of infection cases of COVID-19 is 137,448 (official figure) and the death cases is 3, 056³.

During the second community outbreak period, the government ordered lockdowns in certain zones in Phnom Penh and also restricted traveling across the province as well in order to curb the spread of the virus.

Due to the rapid increase of hospitalized cases, the government expanded the treatment and testing centers in Phnom Penh and other high-risk provinces (provinces that boarder with Thailand), where Cambodian people, including foreigners, can access medical treatment and testing services free of charge. Those who went to have COVID-19 treatment at the centers received free food and treatment services from the government. Cambodian people can access the COVID-19 testing and treatment service of the government freely and equally, and there was no report of discrimination among marginalized communities.

Furthermore, COVID-19 impacted the economy in Cambodia badly, and many people lost jobs and income due to the temporary close or suspense of their work or business operations. In response to this, the government launched the cash transfer project in order to support poor households and families across the country.

Vaccination Situation

In May 2021, the Supreme National Economic Council of the Cambodian government released a Strategic Plan for the National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign to establish socio-economic immunity in Cambodia, aimed at creating community immunity throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia. Furthermore, the strategy aims to establish socio-economic immunity by providing vaccination to priority areas including Phnom Penh and other provinces/cities which have more population and high risk of infection.

Due to vaccination becoming a strategic measure to combat COVID-19, the Government of Cambodia strived to order the vaccine from producer countries and sought support from international institutions and counterpart countries⁴. After receiving the Sinopharm and Sinovac vaccines from China, Cambodia kicked off its vaccination campaign in early February 2021 by starting to focus on high-risk groups, including health workers, police/military officers, and civil servants. On 5 March 2021, furthermore, MoH of Cambodia released a statement on providing AstraZeneca (Covishield through the COVAX program) to prioritize citizens for vaccination, especially the older people (ages from and above 60 years old) who are living in Phnom Penh, Kandal, and Sihanoukville provinces.

Vaccines are available and provided to Cambodian citizens and foreign nationals in Cambodia free of charge. From February 2021 – August 2022, 94.76% of Cambodian citizens compared with the 16 million population are fully vaccinated⁵. The government of Cambodia also showed its attention to providing vaccines to marginalize groups and indigenous communities in the country. For instance, Johnson & Johnson vaccines, from which the government received a donation from the U.S.A, have been used to inject

³ <http://www.cdcmoh.gov.kh/>

⁴ Strategic Plan for the national COVID-19 vaccination in Cambodia.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=439477711542331&set=a.307506831406087>

indigenous people in Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, and Preah Vihear provinces because Johnson & Johnson requires injecting only one dose⁶.

Both donations and purchased COVID-19 vaccines which have been distributed to Cambodia are sufficient to provide to all Cambodian citizens. This is the reason that Cambodia has become one of the countries with the highest vaccination rates globally⁷.

The government of Cambodia achieved the Strategic Plan for the National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign by providing vaccines to all citizens, including children, adults, and elderly people in the priority areas and all provinces across the country. By August 2022, the statistics of the MoH showed that 15,161,027 people of all ages had received at least one dose of the two basic doses. Currently, the government staff has been starting the vaccination campaign for the 4th and 5th doses nationally.

National data released by the Ministry of Health ⁸

Age	1 st Dose	(woman)	2 nd Dose	(woman)	3 rd Dose	(woman)	4 th Dose	woman	5 th Dose	woman
≥ 18 years	10,375,682	5,278,400	10,037,475	5,085,624	6,892,527	3,561,286	3,116,286	1,659,353	924,947	438,770
12- <18 years	1,848,337	914,171	1,794,185	891,313	1,631,996	858,203	793,945	441,896	180,141	100,704
06- <12 years	2,092,140	1,029,924	2,065,172	1,021,613	1,613,857	824,043	651,834	342,236	0	0
05 years	426,486	215,470	374,525	190,443	145,409	70,368	44,335	22,614	0	0
03-05 years	479,983	244,478	314,336	160,581	62,259	31,885	1	1	0	0

The COVID-19 vaccination rate in Cambodia as of November 17, 2022.

- 103.76% of the population aged 18 and over compared to the target population of 10 million
- 101.15% of children and adolescents aged 12 to under 18 years old compared to the target population of 1,827,348
- 110.26% of children from 6 years old to under 12 years old compared to 1,897,382 target population
- 140.14% of 05-year-old children compared to the target population of 304,317
- 78.59% of children aged 3 to under 5 years compared to 610,730 target population

⁶ <https://khmer.voanews.com/a/authorities-vaccinate-johnson-johnson-for-indigenous-people-in-addition-to-other-vaccines/5990583.html>

⁷ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50959189/cambodia-in-top-ten-spot-of-countries-with-highest-vaccination-rates-globally/>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=506514504838651&set=a.307506831406087>

- Vaccination results compared to the total population of 16 million, 95.14% grand total⁹.
- Total death cases 3056 peoples¹⁰

Survey Findings on the Situation of the Marginalized Communities.

CCC conducted the baseline survey on the COVID-19 vaccine with 402 household respondents from indigenous communities and migrant communities in July 2022. The North-eastern areas of Cambodia were selected as the target provinces for the COVID-19 vaccine survey, including Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri, and Mondulakiri provinces for the indigenous community, and Phnom Penh for the migrant communities, Phnom Penh is central for all people who migrate from other provinces to study, work, invest and live in. Diversification of the respondents was included in the baseline survey on the COVID-19 vaccine, including males, females, youths, children, and disabilities. In total, there were 402 households, including 202 household respondents from indigenous communities and 200 household respondents from migrant communities. The following are the results of this survey:

I. Location and respondent

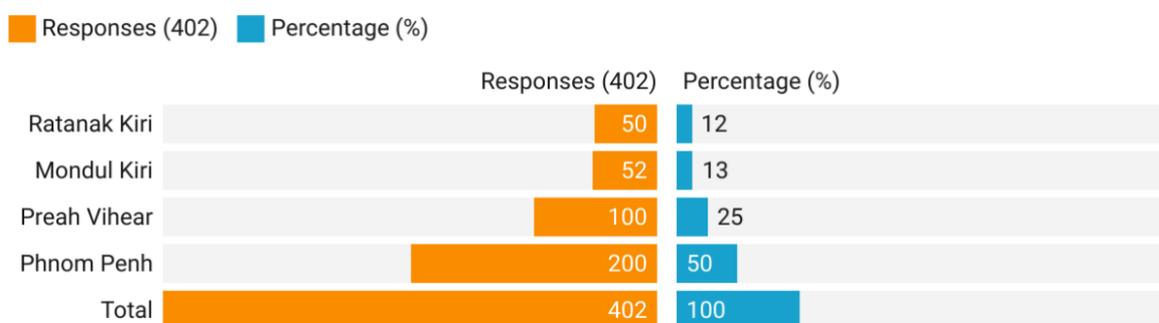
402 households had been interviewed from the Northeast area of Cambodia. 202 households from indigenous communities, including Preah Vihear 100 households (25%), Ratanakiri 50 households (12%), and Mondulakiri 52 households (13%). 200 households (50%) from migrant communities in Phnom Penh.

In total, 402 households consisted of 801 members, 494 (62%) of total household members came from indigenous communities, and 308 (38%) household members came from migrant communities.

447 (56%) of 801 household members are females, and 355 (44%) of them are males.

12 (3%) of 402 households consists people with disabilities have been interviewed.

Target by Provincial

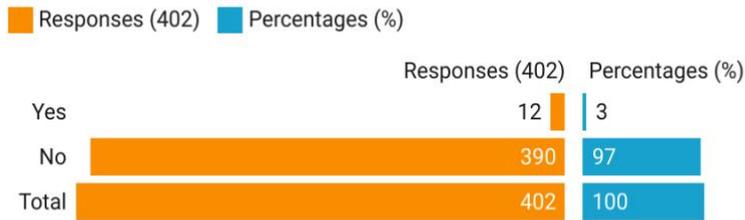


Source: Data Survey • Created with Datawrapper

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=506514504838651&set=a.307506831406087>

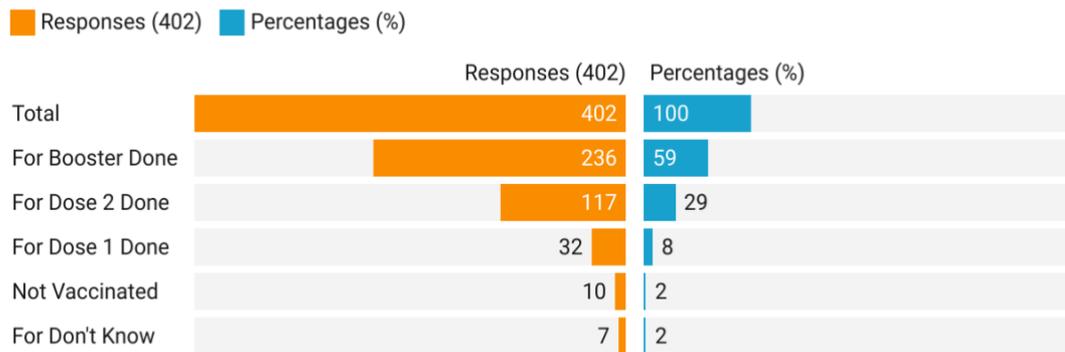
¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=521780313312070&set=a.307506831406087>

Disabilities of HHs



Source: Data Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Vaccinate Status by HHs



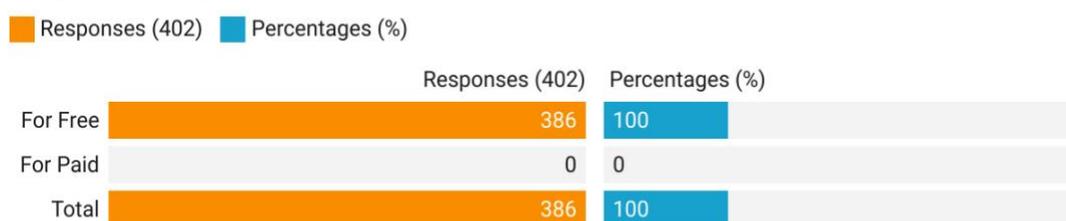
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II. Vaccine status (Does 1, Does 2, Booster, Not Vaccinated, Don't know)

Based on the survey results on the COVID-19 vaccine showed that 32 (8%) of 402 households got 1 dose of vaccine, 117 households (28%) got 2 doses of vaccination, 236 households (59%) got a booster dose, 10 households (2%) rejected to get the vaccination, and 7 households (2%) didn't know the COVID-19 vaccination statuses.

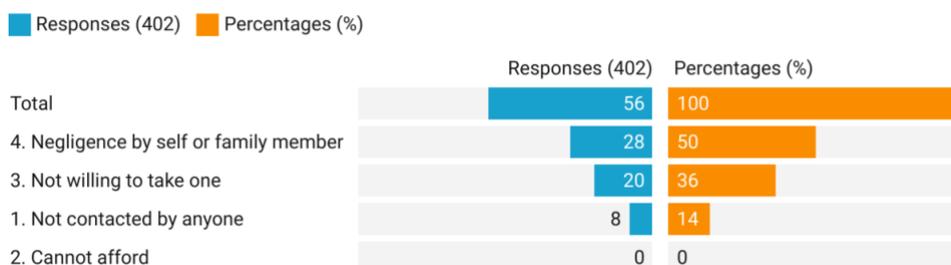
100% of all households who got COVID-19 vaccination confirmed that they could get it from the Cambodian government free of charge.

Payment by HHs



Source: Data Survey • Created with Datawrapper

If not vaccinated and don't know, Why?



Created with Datawrapper

56 members of 17 households, equivalent to 4% of 402 households, did not vaccinate yet. 28 (50%) of 56 members did not vaccinate due to self-negligence or family member negligence, 20 (36%) of them rejected to get the COVID-19 vaccine due to personal issues such as health issues, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, forgetting the vaccination date, etc.

III. In conclusion

Regarding the policy and the baseline survey's result, the mechanisms of the COVID-19 vaccination disseminations and distributions to the population is highly effective, including the vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, disable people, women and children in remote areas, and migrants could access to the free vaccination. There is only a small percentage of the families interviewed did not get vaccinated due to personal issues.

These reflect to the hard efforts of the Royal Government of Cambodia to distribute the free Covid-19 vaccination to the populations in Cambodia.

The Significant of Universal and Free Vaccination

According to the recent definition of the poverty line, the national poverty line in Cambodia is about 18 percent of the total population. The highest poverty rate is in a rural area, at approximately 22.8 percent¹¹. Therefore, rural and indigenous communities are more vulnerability caused by COVID-19 in terms of health care and income loss.

Based on the above-mentioned challenges, Free and Universal Vaccination is very significant for Cambodia as well as other least or developing countries globally because vaccines are among the greatest advances in global health and development¹². Furthermore, Free and Universal Vaccination globally will play a critical role in ending pandemics, restoring the global economy, reducing inequality, and promoting the well-being of global citizens, which will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

State key demands/recommendations

- Call on the United Nations to urge the member states to adopt the universal health policy and provide universal health for all citizens.
- Urge the governments to have COVID-19 recovery programs for marginalized communities and venerable people, especially people with disabilities and elder people.
- Call on the government to provide free and equal vaccines for all citizens.
- Call the TRIPS Waiver what would apply to the COVID-19 vaccine and further global health crisis.
- Call on the government to take all necessary steps to end the pandemic, support marginalized groups, and ensure the fundamental freedom of the citizen, including freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly.

¹¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/immunization>