

Institut Pasteur opens in Vientiane to reduce disease threat

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The Institut Pasteur International Network's 32nd institute opened this week in Vientiane, aiming to reduce the risks of pandemic outbreaks of infectious and parasitic diseases in Southeast Asia.

The Institut Pasteur in Laos' primary mission is to anticipate the risk of pandemics in the country and throughout Southeast Asia, a region that has been hit particularly hard by infectious diseases such as measles, influenza, chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis, and other vector transmitted diseases such as dengue and malaria.

Speaking at the opening of the institute on Monday, Deputy Minister of Health Associate Prof. Dr Som Ock Kingsada said the opening of the Institut Pasteur was a historic event for Laos, as it will serve as a research and training centre.

"It marks an important turning point in the development of the health system in Laos, mainly the para-clinical system that allows access to accurate and rapid diagnostic of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases currently threatening our country," he said.

Virology, vaccine-preventable and infectious diseases and medical entomology and parasitology will be the focuses of the three laboratories, which will boost Laos' research capacity as well as its autonomy in terms of diagnostics and prevention.

The laboratory dedicated to virology will study the evolution of viruses in



Dr Som Ock Kingsada (right) and Prof. Alice Dautry cut a ribbon to open the 32nd Institut Pasteur on Monday.

natural environments and virus adaptation mechanisms in hosts, as well as study animal reservoirs to foresee any possible risks of disease emergence.

The laboratory dedicated to vaccine-preventable and infectious diseases, financed by Luxembourg, will focus on diseases with a high impact on Lao public health, especially measles and mumps. This laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art tools used to study infectious agents.

The laboratory for medical entomology and parasitology, backed by Japan, will focus on the study of vector-transmitted diseases.

In collaboration with the National Centre for Malaria, Parasitology and Entomology, the laboratory will study the impact of environmental changes on mosquito populations. Mosquito vector monitoring

is being developed in close collaboration with the Institut Pasteur in Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Institut Pasteur in Laos also houses a teaching centre, where teams from the Institut Pasteur in Paris, France, can teach locally educated scientists, technicians and field staff.

The Institut Pasteur in Laos is the 32nd member institute of the Institut Pasteur International Network, the first of which was set up in Vietnam in 1891. It will be directed by Dr Paul Brey, who was appointed by the Institut Pasteur in Paris following approval from the Lao government.

The Institut Pasteur in Laos is a Lao National Institute with a budget sourced from Lao government funding, donations, and sponsorship. It is also being backed by the Institut Pasteur in Paris, the

Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the French Ministry of Public Health, private donors including Japanese businesses, and several international institutions including the French Development Agency. In the future, funds streaming from development and research contracts should be sufficient to meet the institute's financial needs.

Former Minister of Health and Honorary Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Institut Pasteur in Laos Dr Ponmek Dalalay, President of the Institut Pasteur in Paris Prof. Alice Dautry, French Ambassador to Laos Mr Francois Senemaud, Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Mr Marc Thill and two ministers to the Government Office, Prof. Dr Bountiem Phissamay and Ms Kheumpheng Pholsena, attended the opening of the institute.