

Vietnam's COVID-19 Prevention Measures

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Vietnam is considered very vulnerable due to its long land borders and extensive trade with the outside world. Some cities are densely populated and have limited medical infrastructures. But Vietnam's low-cost containment strategy has been found to be effective. In mid-June, there were only over 350 confirmed COVID-19 cases. With a total population of nearly 100 million, there were no COVID-19 deaths during the first phase of the pandemic. Notably, Vietnam was one of the first countries in the world to lift all domestic restrictions.

From the very beginning, the Prime Minister has prioritized the people's health over economic issues. This strategy has been rapidly deployed with the military, the

security forces, and police units at the base. These are the unique features of Vietnam's fight against COVID-19.

Shortly after having information on the world's first COVID cases in December 2019, Vietnam immediately made risk assessments. By January 21, 2020, the Ministry of Health issued guidelines on the prevention and detection of the disease along with its available services. By January 30, 2020, a national response plan was issued, and the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control was established. This committee is Vietnam's key to coordinating actions and communication lines between the stakeholders at different levels of the government.

Strict measures were applied: body temperature checking at the airport, physical distancing, suspension of entry for foreign visitors, and the application of a fourteen-day isolation period for all persons coming from abroad. Schools were temporarily closed. Public events were cancelled. Wearing face masks in public places was mandatory even before the World Health Organization made the recommendation to do so. People were encouraged to wash their hands in public areas such as workplaces and common areas of apartment buildings. Non-essential business services were required to remain closed temporarily. For three weeks starting in early April, limited movement was ordered and carried out strictly across the country.

The assessment of Vietnam's anti-epidemic measures was rigorous and effective. While developed countries adopted a wide range of costly testing strategies, Vietnam focused on high risk and suspected cases. They performed 350,000 tests in a population of nearly 100 million people. A method of large-scale tracing and isolation up to the third transmission level of confirmed subjects was applied.

Communities with positive COVID-19 cases were quickly tested and isolated to limit the virus from further spreading to the community. An estimated 450,000 people were quarantined in hospitals, state-run facilities, and their residences. Hospital quarantine and treatment facilities were free of charge for all Vietnamese. Early containment and use of existing military and public facilities were cost-effective. The anti-epidemic cost is estimated to be about 0.2 percent of the GDP, with about 60 percent of the expenditure allocated for equipment and the remaining 40 percent for anti-epidemic activities.¹

Openness and transparency are also important factors in Vietnam's success. From the very beginning, communication about the new coronavirus and the government's prevention strategy was transparent. Details of symptoms, defense

¹ Era Dabla-Norris, Anne-Marie Gulde-Wolf, and Francois Painchaud, "Vietnam's Success in Containing COVID-19 Offers Roadmap for Other Developing Countries," *IMF News*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/06/29/na062920-vietnams-success-in-containing-covid19-offers-roadmap-for-other-developing-countries>.

measures, and testing points were communicated through the media: government websites; on-site units; and posters in hospitals, offices, condominiums, and markets. Text and voice messages were even sent to individual mobile subscribers. The government also launched a close contact tracking app in major cities. This well-organized multimedia approach strengthened public confidence and ensured that the whole society followed epidemic control and containment measures. Transparent and effective communication channels helped people fight the epidemic.

Before July 20, 2020, Vietnam was nearly 100 days clear of new infections. People from abroad entering Vietnam were always thoroughly isolated and safely secured from the epidemic. However, from July 22, 2020, a series of infections emerged in Da Nang, South Central Vietnam's tourist capital. From there, it spread to other localities. It was only during this period that hundreds of people illegally entered Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City by land from a country where COVID-19 has been highly transmitted. This indicates that the infection in Da Nang must have come from abroad. These uncontrolled foreign infections have resulted in a series of positive cases, which is completely different from the first wave of infections.

Vietnam's second wave of infections, specifically in Da Nang, is substantially different from the first wave in size and nature. Only 18 days passed before the number of new infections to be treated reached 419 cases, more than double

the first epidemic peak of 178 cases. The first wave did not even reach the second epidemic peak of 17 recorded deaths, considering that there were no COVID-19 cases before July 22, 2020; whereas the second wave of infections resulted in a national epidemic that spread from Quang Nam and Da Nang. For every 1 million, 132 people were infected, 124 people were treated in hospitals, and there were 4.16 recorded deaths. While the whole country of Vietnam has not experienced the epidemic, Quang Nam and Da Nang have become epidemic areas with a relatively high level of contagion.

To stamp out the epidemic in Quang Nam and Da Nang and to continually keep Vietnam free from local transmissions, our epidemic prevention and control attitudes and methods for Quang Nam and Da Nang and other localities must be studied in comparison with the first wave of infections. Through lessons from Vietnam's successful COVID-19 epidemic prevention prior to July 2020 and the lessons from other countries' successful and unsuccessful epidemic prevention and control, we are hopeful that we can successfully prevent epidemics in other localities and eliminate the epidemic in Quang Nam and Da Nang.

This road to success is grounded in a selection of mottos and solutions. First, we have the motto of epidemic prevention and control at the request of epidemiologists: "early detection, prompt quarantine, identifying disease-prone areas and fighting the disease with the strongest

determination without negligence.”² Second, according to the requirements of the implementing organization, the guideline for epidemic prevention outlines that tasks, commands, human force, vehicles, and logistics must be in place. Third, epidemic prevention requires the synergy of Vietnamese society, where the Party leads and is most responsible. The State directs and is directly accountable to the people and the Party. The whole political system joins in, promoting the Vietnamese people’s tradition of solidarity, compassion, and resilience. Each citizen is a soldier, each family is a fighting team, and each district is a solid fortress for preventing and fighting against the epidemic.

In Vietnam’s synergistic system, the current on-site tasks are stamping out the epidemic in Quang Nam and Da Nang and separating it from other localities for the next two to three weeks. Determined to ban illegal entry in the next six months, Vietnam is strictly monitoring its roads and borders. The localities geographically bordering Quang Nam and Da Nang (Thua Thien Hue, Kon Tum, Quang Ngai) have a high epidemic risk, thereby requiring the implementation of appropriate measures.

Depending on Quang Nam’s and Da Nang’s level of human interaction in July, other provinces and cities have deployed appropriate measures to prevent the epidemic

² Tran Dac Phu, “VN Ready for Whatever COVID-19 Brings: Expert,” *VietNam News*, March 11, 2020, <https://vietnamnews.vn/society/653390/vn-ready-for-whatever-covid-19-brings-expert.html>.

according to the three above-mentioned epidemic prevention mottos. The Ministry of Health should be the bidding focal point for all medical equipment, supplies, drugs for nationwide epidemic prevention and control in Quang Nam and Da Nang. The National Steering Committee for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 is required to (1) make a forecast of its spread in our country every three days and every week, and (2) will identify measures to be implemented in the country, its branches, and localities.

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