

REPORT DISEASE AND HEALTH HAZARD NEWS OF INTEREST ALONG THE BORDER

March 30 - April 5, 2023

WEEKLY EVENTS

- On March 30, 2023, the Ministry of Public Health reported that the global COVID-19 situation is showing decreasing trends in the number of new cases and deaths, reflective of similar trends in Thailand. Data from March 19-25, 2023 reported 150 new cases (an average of 21 cases per day) and six deaths (an average of one death per day). Most of the deaths were among the group of "608" people who had not yet received a vaccine or had been vaccinated more than three months ago with a Long-Acting Antibody (LAAB) vaccine. The LAAB vaccine was found to be highly safe and without severe side effects, reducing the mortality rate by up to 48% compared to those who did not receive a LAAB vaccine. The Ministry of Public Health has informed relevant agencies to accelerate the administration of the LAAB vaccine to high-risk groups in nursing homes, bedridden patients, and patients with kidney failure, while urging COVID-19 vaccinations for other risk groups.
- On March 31, 2023, the Ministry of Public Health warned the public about heat stroke, which is prevalent during the hot season and affects high-risk groups such as the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. Basic first aid should be provided immediately upon finding a patient, including moving them to a shaded area with good air circulation to help cool down. They should be positioned in a supine position to aid breathing, while loosening tight clothing to increase comfort, and applying a cool, damp cloth to affected areas such as the forehead, neck, and armpits. Patients should be transported to a hospital as soon as possible if they experience symptoms such as dizziness, cramps, or fainting.

DANGERS OF AMMONIA LEAKS

On March 27, 2023, a frozen food factory in Hat Yai district, Songkhla province, had a leaking ammonia incident. The factory employs many migrant workers.

Incidents of ammonia leaks occur almost every year. According to statistics from the Department of Pollution Control, from October to March 2017, there were six ammonia leak incidents. From 2020 to 2022, one incident occurred per year. At the beginning of this year, one incident occurred in Rayong province. Such incidents occur repeatedly but in different locations despite the fact that the Department of Industrial Works produced a "Highly Hazardous Chemical Management Guide for Ammonia" in 2010. If industrial factories are strict in adhering to the regulations, incidents like this should not occur repeatedly.

The repeated leaks of ammonia can have impacts on the health of both industrial workers and surrounding communities in both the short and long terms. Respiratory symptoms from inhalation exposure can include coughing, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, and fainting. Prolonged exposure may lead to respiratory tract diseases such as chronic bronchitis and may even cause death. Ammonia exposure to skin may cause skin irritation, burns, blisters, tissue damage, and infection. Exposure to the eyes may cause irritation, burning, and even blindness. Furthermore, there are environmental implications. When wastewater contaminated with ammonia is disposed and released into public water sources, it reduces the amount of oxygen in the water, causing fish and other aquatic organisms to die. Nevertheless, workers and residents of areas nearby industrial factories that have had ammonia leak incidents should monitor their symptoms for about a month. If they experience symptoms such as coughing, sore throat, or increased phlegm, they should seek medical attention.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OFFICIALS

The Provincial Governor has coordinated with the Provincial Public Health Office, the Provincial Industry Office, and related agencies to inform the community about the incident. Related agencies, including the industrial plants themselves, should work together to rapidly provide knowledge on ammonia or any other hazardous chemicals that are used. Key information to be shared includes the dangers that could result from exposure, initial symptoms, prevention measures, and annual health check-ups for nearby residents, including factory workers. Industrial plants should also conduct emergency drills for chemical spills to build confidence among workers and the community in the area. This will enable industrial plants and communities to coexist safely.

INFORMATION COLLECTED AND ANALYZED BY

Multisectoral Capacity Development Program for Public Health Emergency Detection and Response in Border Areas

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Sources

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