

From The Editor

The passing 2023 remained the year of infection

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Since the start of the year, the total number of Covid cases has reached 36,204, with 826 cumulative deaths [1]. The dominant sub-variants of COVID-19 in Thailand are XBB.1.9.2 (24.5%), followed by 23.3% of EG.5, 17.8% of XBB.1.16 and 11.9% of XBB.2.3 [2]. The XBB.1.16, or Arcturus is the descendent of Omicron. It was first detected in India in early January and has been steadily spreading in several countries. There is no proven evidence that the variant causes more symptoms, except for those suffering from underlying diseases. 2023 is the COVID-19 infections' fourth year of entering and the severity of the disease has declined substantially, even though the virus continues to mutate.

Starting from infected foreigners in May last year, the Monkeypox outbreak in Thailand has spread rapidly among Thai nationals in central and eastern Thailand to a total of 535 cases consisting of 481 Thais, 50 individuals of foreign origin, and 4 cases where the nationality was not disclosed [3]. More than 80% are homosexual males and almost half are HIV positive. Bangkok and central Thailand recorded the highest number, followed by eastern Thailand and Phuket. One casualty has been reported within the total cases.

The highest HIV infection rates in Thailand, previously among sex workers and men who had sex with men, has now shifted to the younger population. Nearly half of the annual 9,000-plus new HIV infections are individuals aged between 15 and 24 years old [4].

Melioidosis, also known as Whitmore's disease, is triggered by *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, and typically found in contaminated soil, water, rice paddies, and cropping farms. It is endemic in Southeast Asian countries. Thailand's Department of Disease Control (DDC) disclosed that 582 cases of the illness have been identified this year in lower northeastern and deep south of the country, claiming the lives of the approximately 10 farmers [5]. This is the first time in recent years that the disease has led to fatalities. Melioidosis can spread to both humans and animals through direct contact with a contaminated source. Humans can contract the disease by touching or ingesting contaminated soil and water, or even by inhaling the organism. Symptoms, which include high fevers, abscesses, and respiratory infections, can appear one to 21 days post-exposure, depending on the body's antibody levels [6]. A fatal case of typical melioidosis from India was reported in this issue.

Dengue fever is a clear and present danger for tropical countries, including Thailand. The number of dengue fever patients in Thailand recorded between January 1st and November 1st was more than 123,000, which is an increase up to three folds compared to last year. Among the 123,000 people infected, 139 died and most were in the 25-34 age group [7].

Between January 1 and November 25, there were 548 cases of meningitis caused by *Streptococcus suis* in Thailand, with 26 fatalities, mostly in the northeastern part of the country. It is likely attributable to consuming contaminated raw or undercooked pork. The public is advised not to consume undercooked pork and buy pork from reliable sources with standards, not from unknown sources [8,9].

When it comes to tuberculosis, the oldest and still number one enemy in the human history, Thailand is successful in remarkable reduction of the mortality rate in HIV-positive individuals. However, reductions in the incidence rate of and the number of deaths in tuberculosis in HIV-negative people are still far from milestones, even lower than the global current status [10] regardless of the fact that Thailand ranks number one in the Universal Health Coverage index. The National Plan of Action on tuberculosis phase 2 (2023-2027) determines new goals,

indicators, measures and timeline. The chest radiograph remains the screening tool and will be used in all at-risk people. The shortage of radiologists in interpreting chest radiographs will be overcome by applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the triaging purpose. The Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand guides the proper use of AI and provides radiographic data set of pulmonary tuberculosis for external validation.



The editor, on behalf of the Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand (RCRT), gives a talk about the role of RCRT in guiding and promoting the proper use of AI on 14 December 2023 in the conference held by the Division of Tuberculosis, the Department of Disease Control, the Ministry of Health.

The Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand (RCRT) in collaboration with the Foundation for Orphan and Rare Lung Disease (FORLD) hosted the 2024 annual meeting among thoracic radiologists and participants during 20-22 October in Bangkok. The business meeting among thoracic radiologists, taking place on 20 October, focused on rising issues which were grouped into 5 agendas: a post implementation review of the National HRCT Protocol, the safety and effectiveness of the diagnostic imaging, HRCT interpretation for suspected or at-risk or with known interstitial lung disease including the standard report of HRCT in patients with fibrotic lung disease, the recommended CT protocol for patients with thoracic malignancy in the public health universal coverage system, and a review of the guideline for determining the fibrotic extent on HRCT. The details and conclusions of all agendas were published in this issue.





The editor together with the president of RCRT (middle), panellists and speakers in the 2024 annual meeting of thoracic radiology.

I sincerely wish all the readers, authors, our valued reviewers, and editors a more prosperous 2024.

Wiwatana Tanomkiat, M.D.
Editor,
The ASEAN Journal of Radiology
Email: aseanjournalradiology@gmail.com

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