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Letter

Experience in responding to COVID-19 outbreaks from Vietnam

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Since 22nd January 2020, Vietnam has experienced three waves of SARS-CoV-2 infection and 1347 confirmed cases, including 665 community-transmitted cases and 35 deaths [1]. All outbreaks have been effectively contained, with no new community transmission between 3rd September and 30th November 2020 (Fig. 1). In reviewing our experience and lessons learned, we share five key control measures used to effectively contain the pandemic.

First, Vietnam took early and strong actions. National policies prioritized the health of its people with mass mobilization of resources across sectors. Prior to the first case of COVID-19, the country had developed action plans and technical guidelines for COVID-19 responses. Second, screening and testing were implemented nationwide, focusing upon high-risk groups regardless of their symptoms or exposure to detect new cases and identify chains of transmission. Third, rigorous contact tracing has been undertaken to identify close contacts exposed to infectious cases in the previous 14 days. All close contacts were asked to list their own contacts to allow early triage if that contact developed COVID-19. Fourth, 14-day quarantine was mandated for people with history of exposure or suspect cases, regardless of initial test results. All confirmed cases were managed at designated quarantine hospitals. Finally, preventive measures were mandated, including wearing masks, social distancing and a restriction on international arrivals to Vietnam. Partial lockdowns were implemented in communities where new outbreaks occurred.

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Despite successes in COVID-19 response, Vietnam has been affected by the pandemic in many ways. In the first two quarters of 2020, economic growth slowed. Tourism, hospitality, food, transportation, manufacturing, and informal sectors were significantly affected. Widespread lockdowns initially affected many people's livelihoods and reduced spending. However, while the unemployment rate was expected to be double the rate of 6.9% in 2019, the worst forecasts have not been realised. An assessment of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 suggests that applying strict pandemic response early helped Vietnam to eliminate the virus and sustain economic positive growth [2–4]. The country has been taking proactive steps in developing affordable test kits and vaccines.

Nevertheless, greater attention is needed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 upon vulnerable populations, including the poor, migrants, ethnic minorities, and people working in the hardest hit sectors [5]. Disruption to the healthcare system has increased diagnostic delay and reduced access to treatment for other diseases. It is crucial that Vietnam remains vigilant against future outbreaks and sustains its existing efforts to guard against new outbreaks.

Author Contributions

Thu-Anh Nguyen, Binh Thi Cam Nguyen: collected data and information, drafted the letter. Duyen Thi Duong: collected data and information, commented on the draft letter. Guy B. Marks, Greg J. Fox: wrote and finalized the letter.

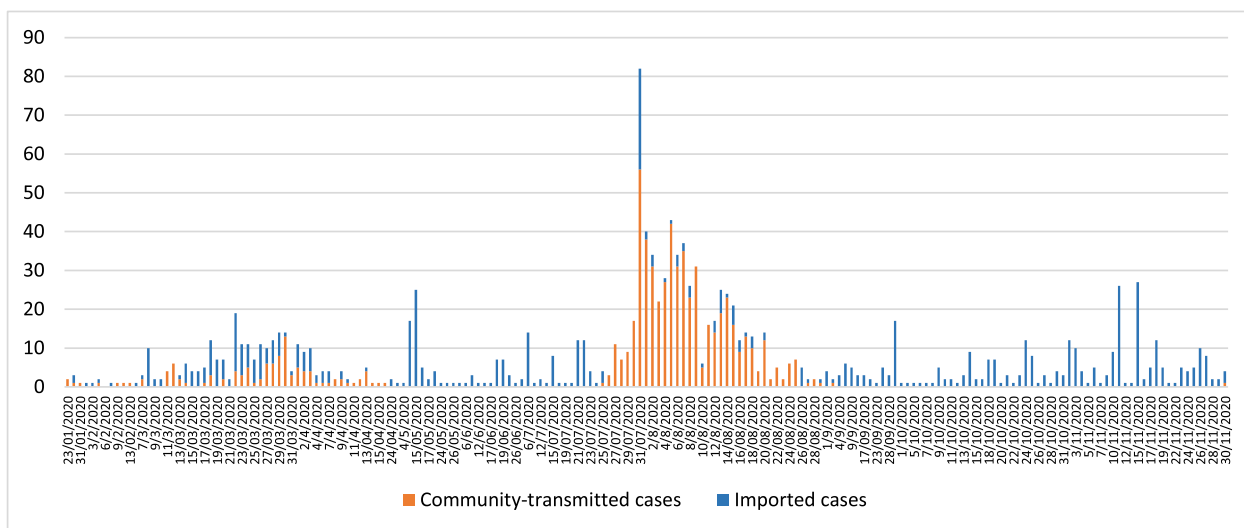


Fig. 1. Number of daily COVID-19 new cases in Vietnam [1].

Declaration of Interests

The authors confirm that we do not have any competing interests.

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