

Controlling the COVID-19 Pandemic in Vietnam: Lessons From a Limited Resource Country

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Abstract

The lessons learned from Vietnam, a country that the world acclaimed for its management of the fight against COVID-19, could stand out as an example of how to do more with less. The Vietnamese government has acted swiftly at the very early stage of the pandemic with a focus on containment efforts and extensive public health measures, particularly (1) the commitment from the government with a multisectoral approach; (2) a timely, accurate, and transparent risk communication; (3) active surveillance and intensive isolation/quarantine operation, case management with tracing all new arrivals and close contact up to 3 clusters; and (4) suspension of flights, shutting schools, and all nonessential services.

Keywords

COVID-19, SARS-COV-2, pandemic, Vietnam, lessons learned

To date (April 10, 2020), Vietnam has had 255 confirmed cases with more than 125 recoveries and no deaths due to COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Despite being one of the earliest countries influenced by the pandemic (first confirmed case on January 23, 2020), Vietnam has received the world's acclaim for its low-cost and effective strategy in their fight against COVID-19. The lessons learned from what Vietnam has done so far could stand out as an example of how to do more with less. The Vietnamese government has acted swiftly at the very early stage of the pandemic with a focus on containment efforts and extensive public health measures (Table 1). The 4 lessons that the country teach us are as following:

1. A strong political commitment and prompt actions with the engagement of stakeholders

The highest leaders with whole political system including related agencies and localities such as health sector, public security force, the army, civil societies of Vietnam follow a supreme goal to protect public health and life, and no one is left behind during the COVID-19 pandemic.² Just 1 week after the first case, the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control comprising representatives from 23 ministries and media agencies was established and chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister by January 30, 2020.

2. Best risk communication practice

Vietnam has performed one of the best risk communication practice in its history. Vietnam adopts a whole-of-society and

multisectoral approach with a timely, accurate, and transparent communication sharing through most common and official channels such as websites, television, radio, newspaper, social media, mobile phone messages, and so on. The government also keeps a close eye on all fake news and misinformation regarding COVID-19.

3. Intensive surveillance, case management, contact tracing, and large-scale health quarantine

Vietnam is one of the best countries conducting intensive surveillance, contact tracing, and lockdown operation for all newly COVID-19-confirmed cases. It has very successfully identified the epidemiological linkage of infection source. On March 20, community transmission was revealed with 2 clusters in the 2 most populous cities in Vietnam. Vietnam has acted promptly by initiating large-scale tests for COVID-19 for more than 15 000 people.³ To date, the situation in both clusters has been brought under control. The close monitoring is also coming from a strong culture of surveillance in Vietnam. People will inform on their neighbors if they suspect any wrong-happenings.

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Table 1. Key COVID-19 Interventions in Vietnam.

Date	Key Actions
<i>Second wave of COVID-19 interventions in Vietnam (from March 5, 2020)</i>	
April 1	Implemented the whole-society distancing during April 1 to 15, 2020
March 22	Entry was suspended for all foreigners (Vietnamese people were also suggested not to return to Vietnam except for urgent needs) Cancellation of all foreign flights
March 21	Mandatory 14-day quarantines for all arrivals in Vietnam
March 10	Mandatory health status declaration for all arrivals in Vietnam
March 6	New cases emerged starting the second wave of COVID-19 infection in Vietnam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept extending schools' reopening Flight suspension to the epicenters of the pandemic, including China, Korea, Iran, and Italy. Visa suspension for citizens from affected areas including the European Union and countries with over 500 cases or recorded over 50 new cases in a day.
<i>First wave of COVID-19 interventions in Vietnam during January 3 to March 4, 2020</i>	
March 4	Successfully finished the 21-day health quarantine for people in the main area of COVID-19 infection in a Northern province, Vietnam
February 24	Guideline on quarantine/suspending people returning from affected areas including China and Korea
February 11	Conducted quarantine and performed community infection prevention and control, and case management for a commune in a Northern province (Vinh Phuc) due to high number of confirmed cases of workers returning from a training in Wuhan, China
February 7	Issued/updated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Interim Guideline on Surveillance, Prevention, and Control of 2019-nCoV Guideline on Home Quarantine Guideline on Centralized Quarantine Guideline on Diagnosis and Treatment of 2019-nCoV
February 5	Cross-border transportation of goods to China was kept with close monitoring, preventive, and control measures
January 31	Suspension all flights and cross-border arrivals to and from China Exemption of VISA for tourists who have been to or transited through China in the past 14 days Repatriation plan for Vietnamese in China
January 23	<i>Reported first confirmed case</i>
January 15 to 30	Setting up of the National Steering Committee (chaired by Deputy Prime Minister) Issued the National Response Plan on January 20 (and updated on January 30)
January 3	Risk assessment for 2019-nCoV was conducted.

4. A series of suspension for flights, shutting schools, and closing all public places

Right after the first confirmed case, a series of initiatives was implemented to control the spread of the pandemic. The country suspends and temporarily denies entry of foreigners and all international visitors. All schools and other non-essential services have been shutting for more than 3 months.

Current Challenges

The major challenge for the country now is to control potential community transmission clusters. Besides, Vietnam is prioritizing developing/revising its National Strategy Plan for COVID-19 prevention and control.

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