South East Asia is developing rapidly, with societies and health in transition. Rising prosperity and levels of education have led to increasing investment in health services and systems, and yet despite this impressive progress, the region faces health challenges old and new.

Alongside the unfinished agenda of tackling infectious diseases, malnutrition, and child and maternal mortality, South East Asia is on the front line of pandemic influenza, evolving drug-resistance in malaria and other pathogens, public health impacts of earthquakes and floods, and above all, the growing threat of non-communicable diseases such as cancers, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Our School has been working in the region for over a century, however in today’s increasingly globalised world, the traditional model of the ‘rich north’ solving the problems of the ‘poor south’ is no longer relevant. We must embrace greater interdependence, expertise and pluralism in both problems and solutions.

This is why we are working closely with the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health in Singapore, Mahidol University in Bangkok, and numerous other partners to develop and foster regional networks for research, education and innovation, in order to understand these challenges fully and develop practical solutions.

Effective public health provision requires governments to act, but more importantly depends on the sustained creativity of institutions, communities and individuals – scientists, health workers, activists, entrepreneurs and philanthropists – to develop and implement innovative programmes that can be replicated globally.

We can only achieve this by working together, driven by our shared mission to improve health for all. We hope that by reading these pages, you will be inspired to support us and to join us.

Professor Baron Peter Piot
Director and Professor of Global Health

We hope that our collaboration will result in enhanced education, vital research programmes and policies for our region and worldwide”
Professor Chia Kee Seng, Dean, Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore

In 2011, the School established a strategic partnership with the newly-founded Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health in Singapore. We are already engaged in staff and student exchanges, academic and extensive collaborative programmes in infectious disease control and health systems. Our objective is to improve public health by conducting research that is relevant to practitioners and policy-makers.

For academic partnerships to be successful, both strong commitment at the leadership level as well as active ground-level collaboration are crucial. Moving forward, the two Schools will work together at integrating diverse disciplines into cutting-edge public health research. We hope this will result in a Joint Centre supported by joint appointments and a joint PhD programme. I am therefore very confident that this collaboration will be a robust and fruitful one and together we can ‘Turn Discovery into Healthier Communities’.”
Prof. Chia Kee Seng, Dean of the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore
Putting health on the map: some key projects and partnerships

1. The scenarios in Cambodia
Determined by studies in resource poor countries in anticipation of future pandemics or challenges. Dr Sanjiv, Director of Cambodia’s Surveillance Centre, along with Tom Drake, Richard Coker and other colleagues from the School, with funding from the German government, are conducting economic analyses of pandemic influenza scenarios, resource allocation, and risk uncertainty to support Cambodia’s pandemic preparedness strategies.

2. Working in Myanmar
School researcher Kajorna Satapanya works extensively in Myanmar with Military San Frick and EPP and is publishing findings from a major HIV treatment implementation geographic Information Systems specialist Choa Sandy is working with medical professionals, medical volunteers and village health volunteers to support a network of village health volunteers.

3. Health systems and financing
The RIDC Consortium, led by Kala Haron, is working on a range of health systems projects with ARF, ThaiColes, Indian Institute of Technology and the Health Strategy & Policy Institute. The Consortium has established the Centre for Global Non Communicable Diseases as a multi-disciplinary collaborative network to work on NCDS worldwide.

4. Tracking drug-resistant malaria
The Tracking Resistance to Artemisinin Collaboration (TRAC) is a multi-country multi-disciplinary collaboration funded over 3 years by the UK Government Department of International Development. Partners include Mahidol University, Bangkok, and the Cambodian National Malaria Control Programme. It is investigating the impact of drug resistance on antimalarial drugs and the host community. These results are helping to understand drug resistance.

5. Treating HIV in refugees
A consortium of researchers from the School and the School, the UK’s National Centre for Life Sciences and the Malaysian Ministry of Health evaluated antiretroviral adherence in a public clinic in Kuala Lumpur, finding no difference in virological outcomes between refugees and the host community. These results have facilitated a policy of equal provision to refugees and the host community in the urban setting.

6. Sanitation and dysentery
Shigella bacterium is the major cause of dysentery worldwide, and as the night has developed there has been a dramatic species shift, related to improvements in infrastructure and sanitation. Funded by the Wellcome Trust, Dr Stephen Baker has worked with the School for Tropical Diseases in Vietnam to sequence the Shigella genome across the country, in order to determine how drug resistance is arising bacterial evolution.

7. Macaques and malaria in Malaysia
Malaria in Malaysia has become better controlled in several countries in the region due to effective control strategies. Researchers from the School, working with Prof Balbir Singh’s group at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (UMKLAR), have conducted innovative research to reveal the significant problem of Plasmodium falciparum malaria, which is transmitted by mosquitoes that bite on infected macaques. This form of malaria now affects thousands of people across the region, and the team is working with the support of the Wellcome Trust to understand drug resistance.

8. Non-communicable diseases: a new epidemic
Diseases such as cancers, cardiovascular diseases and mental illness are reaching epidemic levels worldwide, and have become a major cause of death across Southeast Asia. In Spring 2012, the School established the Centre for Global Non Communicable Diseases as a multi-disciplinary collaborative network to work on NCDS worldwide.

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11. Protecting children from dengue fever
Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne disease that effects millions across the region. School researcher James Logan is working with Dengue Tools Consortium, Mahidol University and DENGUE Risks Medical Services, Singapore, to investigate strategies for the prevention of dengue in children, educating a team in Thailand to implement these strategies for dengue transmission.

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Understanding and controlling infectious diseases

Tackling anti-malaria drug resistance

Millions of people in South East Asia are affected by malaria. Although efforts to control the disease in many countries over the past decade, malaria parasites in the region are evolving resistance to common anti-malarial drugs.

Dr Shunmay Yeung is a lead investigator for the Tracking Resistance to Artemisinin Collaboration (TRAC), and Deputy Director for the ACT Consortium, based at the School.

She is now working with partners including the Cambodian National Malaria Control Programme, World Health Organisation, Mahidol University, and the World Health Organisation, Partners for Development, and the Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit, on a range of programmes aimed at providing better treatment for malaria and how to improve appropriate treatment of malaria. Researchers from the School’s Malaria Centre are also working extensively on the emerging strain of malaria caused by Plasmodium knowlesi.

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Dr Yeung is one of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine researchers investigating anti-malarial drug resistance and how to improve appropriate treatment of malaria. Researchers investigating appropriate treatment of malaria. Researchers investigating antimalarial drug resistance and how to improve appropriate treatment of malaria. Researchers investigating antimalarial drug resistance and how to improve appropriate treatment of malaria.

Regional health systems and emergencies

Responding to pandemic ‘flu

South East Asia has been hit by a series of influenza pandemics, resulting in widespread deaths. Researchers from the School, led by Professor Richard Eimer (right), are working with partners in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as Germany and the Netherlands, to assess how in various pandemic influenza strains, variations in health system capacity affect health outcomes across the region.

Their findings, published in the Public Library of Science in Spring 2012, show that wide variations exist in pandemic capability between and within the six territories, with substantial mortalities predicted as a result. Seroneutralisation shortages of mechanical ventilators were estimated to be a major cause of avoidable mortalities, with vaccines, hospital beds and staff also invariably distributed within countries.

Disaster mitigation and response

A major challenge facing health systems in South East Asia is how they cope in surges in demand in the wake of disasters such as disease outbreaks, flood, earthquakes and hurricanes.

Embodied Health Systems Analysis is a framework for modelling disaster mitigation and response developed by School researchers with collaborators in Indonesia, funded by the German government. It examines the role of health systems in disaster planning, how different services work together and how well they respond to local conditions.

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine’s work in South East Asia is only possible thanks to the generous support of funders who share our commitment to improving health in this fast-growing region.

But these projects need additional funding to ensure similar discoveries are put to practical use and fledgling projects are allowed to continue and roll out regionally or globally. Gifts from individuals and institutions make all the difference in making sure good ideas become good policy and practices. We hope you will join us in ensuring a healthy future for South East Asia.

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Support our work

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