

Flu Outbreak in Papun District

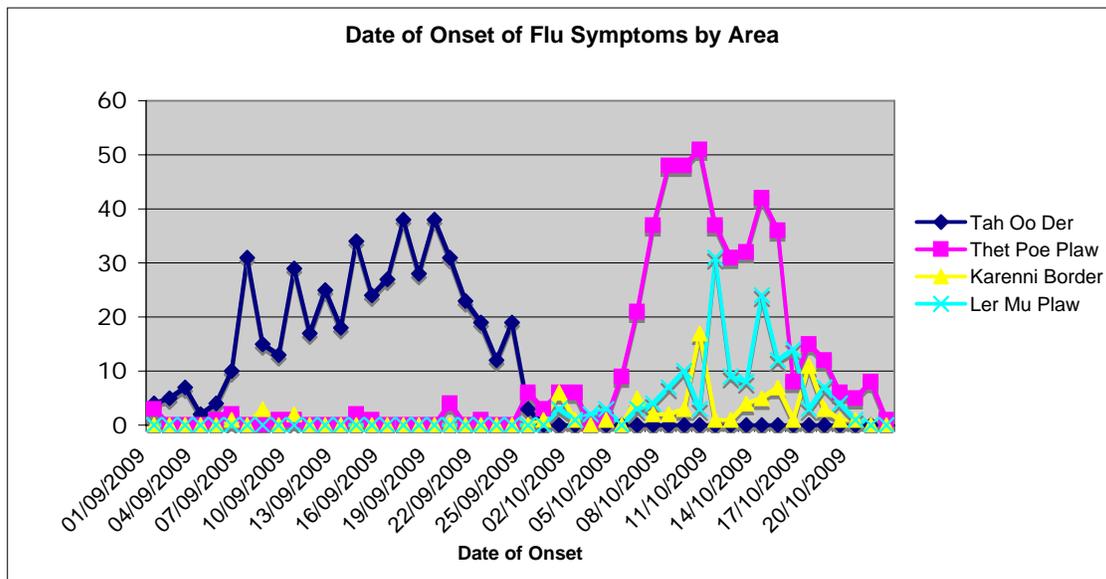
November 25, 2009

Since September, 2009, there has been a flu outbreak in Lu Thaw township of Papun District in northeastern Karen State. In this township, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has a shoot-on-sight policy and actively obstructs villagers' access to health care. Human rights violations resulting in displacement of Karen villagers have increased as the SPDC prepares for the 2010 election. In addition to the flu outbreak, villagers in Lu Thaw township have suffered from an ongoing food crisis resulting from displacement and burning of crops by the SPDC.

On September 11, 2009, villagers in Tah Oo Der village in Papun District in Karen state were identified with influenza-like symptoms, and within a week, seven other villages reported villagers with similar symptoms. Reported symptoms include cough, high fever, body aches and pain, sore throat, running nose, headache, chest pain and diarrhea.

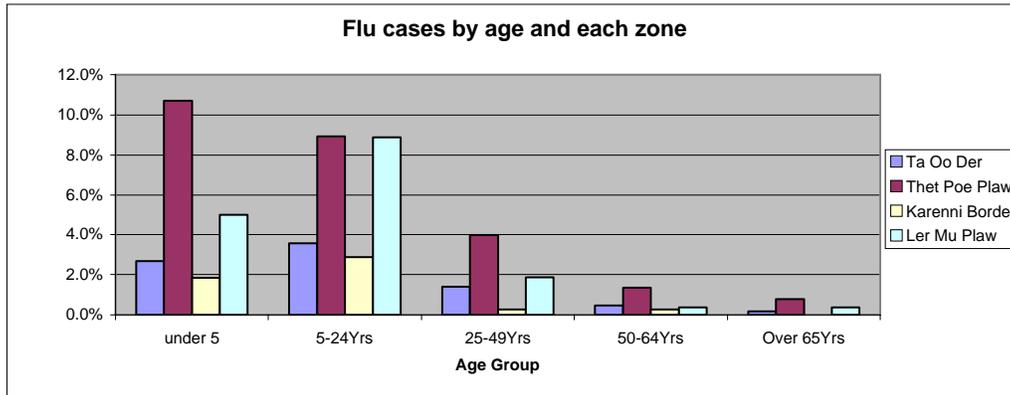
The flu has now spread to at least 35 villages in Papun District. Influenza is common in Karen State during the rainy season (June-September), but the spread of infection was unusually rapid this year. The increased spread of the flu this year is likely a direct result SPDC offensives in the Pa Pun area. In mid-October, in the areas surrounding Thet Poe Plaw, the SPDC burned 15-20 acres of crops and attacked the villagers in that area. All of the villagers from the nearby villages moved into Thet Poe Plaw; the overcrowding in this village facilitated the rapid spread of the flu. Two children in this area have died from the flu.

As of late November, at least 490 cases have been recorded. In Tah Oo Der, the majority of patients experienced their first symptoms in mid-September; in all other areas, the majority of patients experienced their first symptoms in mid-October.



The graph below shows the breakdown of patients with influenza-like illness by area and age group. Influenza-like illness was defined as having a fever and a cough or a fever and a sore throat. While 1,167 patients exhibited symptoms that could be related to the flu, only 490 met the case definition for influenza-like illness. The estimated population of the affected area is 3,630. Most of the cases are young people under age 24 and school age children. Thirteen percent of the entire population, 37% of children under five, and 41% of youth ages 5-24 years old suffered from influenza-like illness. Five

schools in the area were closed from 22nd September to October 6th, 2009. The student population of these schools is around 350 students.



In response to the outbreak, the Back Pack Health Worker Team, Karen Department of Health and Welfare mobile health clinics in Papun area, and Pha Hite Clinic have organized a task force to respond effectively and immediately to this outbreak. The strategies undertaken include:

- Surveillance System
- Health Campaign
- Treatment and care

To assess whether villagers were infected with novel influenza A H1N1 and avian influenza H5N1, influenza test kits provided by a local Thai hospital were sent to the affected area and 5 sample swabs were collected on the 24th September and sent to the Thai local hospital on the 25th September. On September 29th, we received the test results of the 5 specimens and all showed that the causative agents were seasonal human influenza viruses.

In order to prevent further spread, BPHWT and KDHW organizations and villagers need more support for campaign materials and the surveillance system.