

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Improving understanding of COVID-19, Measles, Rubella, Hepatitis B and Dengue epidemiology in Timor-Leste

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Vaccination is a very important strategy in Timor-Leste, for protecting people against diseases including COVID-19, measles, rubella and hepatitis B. Vaccination is available through Government health services in Timor-Leste, but there is substantial variation in the uptake of different vaccines across different municipalities.

A new national seroprevalence study, launched recently, aims to describe the extent of immunity to vaccine preventable diseases, including COVID-19, measles, rubella, hepatitis B and dengue in Timor-Leste. The study team will visit randomly selected households, and more than 5,000 people will be invited to participate, from every municipality in Timor-Leste.

This new study will be carried out by Menzies through the ARIA-RISE project in partnership with the Ministry of Health (MoH) Timor-Leste, National Health Laboratory (NHL), and the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) and funded by Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The research team for the national seroprevalence study, led by Dr Nelson Martins (Principal Investigator, Menzies), presented research proposal together with Dr Sarah Louise Sheridan (Co-Investigator, NCIRS) for to the Technical and Research Ethics Committee at National Health Institute (INS), Dili.

Menzies researcher Dr Nelson Martins, says that it is very important to understand how many people have immunity to these infectious diseases in Timor-Leste, in order to provide evidence based data to guide MOH policy and strategies to control and eliminate these diseases in Timor-Leste.

Dr Sarah Sheridan, agreed with Dr Nelson, saying that the study findings are likely to strengthen Timor-Leste's ability to efficiently prevent future outbreaks of diseases such as measles and rubella by enabling targeted vaccination drives in non-immune populations.

Following significant transmission of COVID-19 throughout Timor-Leste in 2021, determining what proportion of the population have evidence of antibodies against COVID-19 from either infection or vaccination, will help with planning for the ongoing public health response.

*"This study is very important especially in the cases of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste, and it will help the Integrated Crisis Management Center (CIGC) to understand the prevalence of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste,"* Mr Caetano Gusmão, Chief of the INS research department said.

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**Menzies School of Health Research**

Menzies is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses, Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

