



**World Health  
Organization**

Western Pacific  
Philippines

# DOH, RITM, WHO establish subnational laboratories to expand the country's capacity in detecting vaccine-preventable diseases

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The Department of Health (DOH), through the leadership of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) and the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), is establishing seven subnational laboratories (SNLs) for the detection of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) in the Philippines.

The SNLs, located in various regions of the country, lay the foundation of a public health laboratory network for the timely confirmation of infectious diseases and a more efficient response to outbreaks. To fully operationalize the SNLs, the WHO provided over P36 million worth of laboratory equipment and supplies. Secretary of Health Dr. Francisco T. Duque III received the donations in a turnover ceremony held today on January 20, 2022 at the DOH.

The SNLs will serve as confirmatory testing hubs for common vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, rubella, rotavirus disease, and Japanese encephalitis.

RITM assessed and identified the following regional health facilities as SNLs: Ilocos Training and Regional Medical Center, Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital, Western Visayas Medical Center, Vicente Sotto Medical Center, Zamboanga Medical Center, Southern Philippines

Medical Center, and Cotabato Regional and Medical Center.

“With fluctuating vaccination coverage rates in the last decade, the Philippines, particularly Filipino children, remain at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. This initiative not only gives better tools to care for individual patients, but it also helps to respond more strategically to protect communities,” said Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III.

The establishment of the SNLs expands RITM’s role from being the sole laboratory for the detection and confirmation of VPDs in the country to leading a national public health laboratory network. “With the establishment of these SNLs, we strengthen the laboratory capacity for the detection and confirmation of VPDs. An extensive laboratory network is crucial in confirming early possible outbreaks and allows us to prioritize immediate public health actions,” underscored RITM Director Dr. Celia Carlos.

In the coming months, RITM will set-up up essential equipment and train staff at the SNLs. Furthermore, RITM will establish quality control and assurance measures in preparation for WHO laboratory accreditation. The laboratories are expected to independently perform confirmatory testing within the year.

“A strong public health laboratory network is essential in promoting public health action towards saving lives, especially of children, from vaccine-preventable diseases. Once operational, the SNLs will enable a quicker and more sensitive early alarm for impending outbreaks and will facilitate a more focused response in at-risk communities. We commend the DOH and the RITM for making this a priority in the midst of the pandemic. It is crucial that we also prepare our health system in the prevention and control of outbreaks of other diseases, aside from COVID-19,” said Dr. Rabindra Abeyasinghe, WHO Representative to the Philippines.

RITM is the country’s WHO-accredited National Reference Laboratory for Rotavirus, Japanese Encephalitis Virus, Measles, and Rubella Virus.

The DOH, RITM, and WHO have been long-time partners in strengthening the country’s capacity in the laboratory confirmation and surveillance of infectious diseases.