

# Has the Game Come to an End?

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If you have seen enough of zombie films, you may realize that there are two patterns of ending plots, the virus wins which means all are infected, and the virus is contained which means the human race has successfully built a barrier to stop the virus from further spreading. From April 2022, many countries including Thailand have announced they are re-opening their borders for traveling. Thailand even plans to reduce the level of the situation from a pandemic to an endemic phase in July when travelers will require no test nor quarantine anymore. Questions are raised about the real world meaning of 'endemic' and will the virus follow our policy?

Literally, an endemic refers to a constant presence and usual prevalence of a disease or infectious agent in a population within a geographic area, i.e., Thailand is an endemic area of Human Immunodeficiency Virus, tuberculosis and malaria. When it comes to 'Covid-19 endemic', is it possible to define a geographic area within which the disease resides? Widespread immunization, both naturally occurring by infection and by active vaccination, might be a strong barrier that contains viral spreading. Omicron, the new variant of concern following the deadly Delta, was viewed as a natural vaccine sent from heaven to end the pandemic. Although Omicron was more contagious than the other strains, evidence suggested that infected patients had less severe disease and mortality was lower, especially in those who had been vaccinated or had a past infection(1). However, for those with incomplete immunization, the risk of hospitalization remained high. Inequality in vaccine distribution will place some regions at risk to be endemic areas where SARS-CoV-2 is incubated and offers novel variants to the globe.

With economic pressures, many countries have realized that a 'Zero Covid' policy is not realistic and may not be necessary in a society with adequate herd immunity. The current strategy is then to push vaccine distribution to those who had not been immunized in the first round, in particular, the young and the elderly. In the meantime, health care facilities should be prepared for those with severe infection. No individual place in the world will be safe until all places are safe. Until that time, it is too early to say that the game has come to an end without a plot twist.

## REFERENCE

1. Nyberg T, Ferguson NM, Nash SG, Webster HH, Flaxman S, Andrews N, et al. Comparative analysis of the risks of hospitalization and death associated with SARS-CoV-2 omicron (B.1.1.529) and delta (B.1.617.2) variants in England: a cohort study. *Lancet* 2022; 399:1303-12.