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Melioidosis: Thailand's unknown deadly disease

Thailand's third most-deadly infectious disease kills 40 percent of those infected, but very few have ever heard of it.



In agriculturally intensive regions of Thailand, there are thousands of cases of melioidosis. Of those infected, approximately 40 percent die as a result of the disease [Luke Duggleby/Al Jazeera]

by [Luke Duggleby](#)



Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand - By the time Bunsri Mamak, 50, arrived at Sappasit Prasong Hospital in Ubon Ratchathani city in Thailand's northeast, he was delirious and a very sick man. He had spent several weeks visiting local clinics and hospitals trying to find out what was wrong with him when he first developed the symptoms - high fever and pain in his legs. The doctors he visited failed to diagnose his illness and provide the necessary treatment.

Ultimately, the district hospital advised him to visit the provincial hospital in the city, where he finally received a diagnosis - just in time to save his life.

He had spent 13 days in intensive care receiving intravenous antibiotics to treat the sepsis, the infection that had begun spreading through his blood. Afterwards, he was sent home to rest and complete a 20-week course of oral antibiotics.

Mamak was diagnosed with melioidosis, the little-known disease that is Thailand's third most deadly infectious disease, after AIDS and tuberculosis. He was lucky to be alive.

A deadly disease

The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention **classifies** melioidosis as a microorganism that could be used as a "bioterrorism agent", placing it in the same category as anthrax. Although it has never been used in bioterrorism, this classification gives insight into its dangers to humans.

Endemic to Thailand's northeast, melioidosis is caused by a soil and water-dwelling

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