

Sansiri develops health with free vaccinations for children of workers



A Public Health Ministry staff member gives a free vaccination to a child living on a work site in Samut Prakan province.

THE NATION

MORE THAN 400 children of workers at 24 Sansiri construction sites have been given free vaccinations as part of a joint initiative that will spread nationwide.

The Public Health Ministry, Unicef and Sansiri have already vaccinated 150 children of workers, mostly migrants, at the leading property developer's sites.

The initiative, which is intended to prevent illness and any likely spread of disease, is being monitored by the World Health Organisation.

"Our goal is to provide free vaccinations to all children of our construction workers," Sansiri chief executive Apichart Chutrakul said recently.

At most construction sites, the majority of workers are migrants from neighbouring countries, with only those sites in the Northeast hiring just Thai workers.

Apichart added that Sansiri also intended to give the children access to the company's other benefits, regardless of their status as Thais or migrants.

The company has worked with Unicef for

more than five years to provide a better environment for children of workers.

Safety zones for children are provided at sites and the company has sponsored the education of more than 40 youngsters.

"If their parents continue working with us, their access to education and vaccinations will also have continuity," Apichart said.

The vaccination partnership is being used as an industry model for sustainable development regarding children living on construction sites, whether they are Thais or migrants.

Dr Sopon Mekthon, permanent secretary of the Public Health Ministry, said all Thai children can access 10 vaccines for free, while migrants could buy children's health cards for a one-year healthcare service that included vaccinations.

Among them are vaccines against Hepatitis B, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, Japanese encephalitis and diphtheria.

"However, some of the target groups have not yet received the vaccination service, especially the migrant children of parents in worker camps," he said. "This private-public part-

nership is a milestone in which both Thai and migrant children can get an equal vaccination service."

Unicef representative Thomas Davin said there were numerous obstacles in providing vaccination services to migrant workers' children, even though many parents realised the importance of vaccination.

These include communication difficulties and the lack of awareness among many parents that they have the right to vaccinate their children, he said.

"This partnership will relieve these obstacles, allowing every child to get vaccinated thoroughly. It will be the new standard for other private organisations to realise the importance of children's rights," he said.

The World Health Organisation's acting representative in Thailand, Dr Richard Brown, said building immunity against diseases was a vital public-health mission.

"We are ready to support and coordinate with the Public Health Ministry, private companies and community-based organisations in both academic and practical aspects for further progress," he said.