

Prognosis

Thailand Aims to Boost Vaccines by 50% So It Can Reopen for Tourists

By [Randy Thanthong-Knight](#)

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- Scale up comes as Moody's warns economic recovery at risk
 - Fewer than 1% of Thais have had at least one inoculation
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Thailand aims to boost its vaccine order by more than 50% to 100 million doses this year in a bid to reach herd immunity, as surging local infections threaten to derail plans to reopen borders to tourism and reboot the economy.

The government plans to buy 35 million more doses from two or three manufacturers with a target to administer them all by the end of 2021, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha said a day after chairing a meeting on the country's new inoculation plan. The National Vaccine Institute is in talks with Pfizer Inc. for as many as 10 million doses, he said Tuesday.

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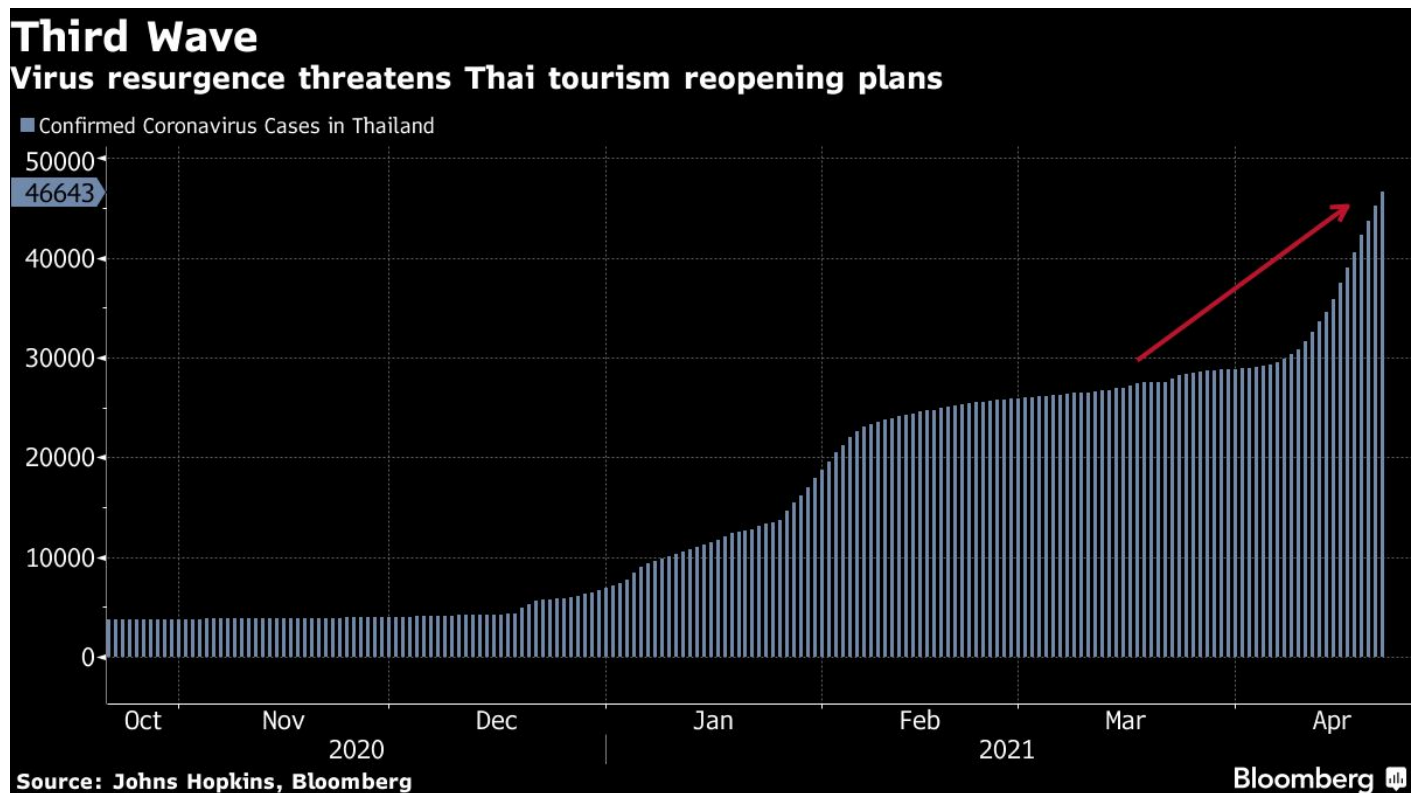
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Thailand's scaling up of vaccination efforts comes as Moody's Investors Service cautioned that a new wave of Covid-19 cases threatens to further derail an economy that relies on tourism for about a fifth of gross domestic product. Infections have surged more than 60% so far this month, prompting at least two GDP downgrades, while fewer than 1% of Thais have received at least one of two vaccine doses.

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“The rollout has been too slow,” Kanit Sangsubhan, secretary general of the Eastern Economic Corridor Office, who attended Tuesday’s meeting with the prime minister, said in an interview.

Thailand has so far relied on Sinovac Biotech Ltd.'s shots for its priority sector workers and people at least 60 years. It's also ordered 61 million doses of AstraZeneca Plc jabs to be locally manufactured by Siam Bioscience Ltd. that will be delivered from June.

Faster Rollout

With a resurgence, the focus should be to administer vaccines as fast as possible in order to reopen for tourists and foreign investors, said Kanit, who's also a member of Bank of Thailand's Monetary Policy Committee. "If we can't contain the outbreak situation and can't reach herd immunity, no one will come here."

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Thailand has announced plans to reopen Phuket from July by waiving quarantine for vaccinated foreign tourists heading there. It's using the resort island as a testing ground before expanding similar easing measures to other destinations such as Koh Samui.

Phuket is on track to inoculate 70% of its adult population before July and the current outbreak is unlikely to delay the planned reopening, Bhummikitti Ruktaengam, president of the Phuket Tourist Association, said on Wednesday. The island will vaccinate 47% of its population by the end of May, similar to the current level in the Maldives, he said.

Thailand's central bank has said its 3% growth forecast for this year faces downward risks if its target of 3 million tourists isn't reached. The nation's tourism industry generated more than \$60 billion in revenue from about 40 million foreign visitors in 2019.

"The outbreak situation and vaccine rollout are two separate issues, and as long as we can reach the herd-immunity target, we can reopen," said Bhummikitti, whose association represents

about 300 members including luxury resort and five-star hotel operators in Phuket. “This is an unstoppable plan.”

– *With assistance by Lee J Miller*

(Updates with more details starting from the fifth paragraph.)

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