

Current major event

COVID-19– The sudden rise of confirmed cases in EMR

The new deadly pathogen, SARS-CoV-2, originated in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, China has become a global threat and has spread in all six regions of World Health Organizations. The recent outbreak in Iran and increasing number of cases has made it a global and regional concern, and EMR is working hard to scale up preparedness and response of countries.

Editorial note

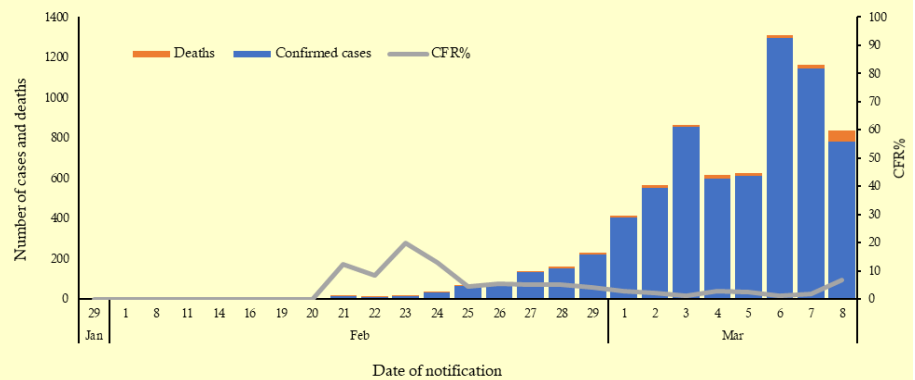
SARS-CoV-2 is the member of the same coronavirus family that caused the previous two epidemics; severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) reported in China 2003, and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012. Civet cats and dromedary camels respectively transmitted these two virus. The etiology of this novel pathogen is yet to be confirmed; however, bats and pangolins are considered the most probable reservoirs as their genetic sequencing matches the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Moreover, the symptoms of coronavirus family are quite similar in all outbreaks and includes fever, cough and difficulty in breathing.

So far, CoVID-19 has infected a huge number of cases worldwide totaling to 109577 confirmed cases from 104 countries/territories/ areas with 3809 deaths. It was good to know that the epidemic peaked and plateaued between 23 January and 2 February 2020, and has been declining steadily for limited period as briefed by DG WHO during a media session 24 February 2020. However, the recent outbreaks outside China has become a global concern as Iran has witnessed a sudden rise in the number of cases. The first case was reported on 19th February 2020 and subsequently the outbreaks spread in most of provinces in the country. As a result, the number of cases rose to 6,566 as of 8th March 2020 with 194 deaths. (See graph) It has served as an epicenter of another outbreak of CoVID-19 cases outside China and the virus has spread to many neighboring EMR countries and also outside EMR. The initial confirmed cases in 16/22 EMR countries have a travel history from Iran.

The Iranian cases were first identified in Qom, a shrine city thought to be the hub of CoVID-19 outbreak outside China. The city was holding a religious ceremony where people from Iran and neighboring countries gathered and were exposed to infection. The travel history of the index case in the Iranian outbreak after detailed investigation found that the case was linked to China.

Keeping in view the fast spreading of SARS-CoV-2 globally, WHO Director General in his media briefing on 24th February 2020 has advised countries to prepare for the pandemic; however, it did not qualify yet to be declared as a pandemic. Simultaneously, EMR has also taken necessary steps to prepare regional countries and has developed a Strategic Response

Cases and deaths of COVID-19 in EMR from Jan 29 to 8 March 2020



WHO's strategic objectives for this response are to:

- Interrupt human-to-human transmission including reducing secondary infections among close contacts and health care workers, preventing transmission amplification events, and preventing further international spread*;
- Identify, isolate and care for patients early, including providing optimized care for infected patients;
- Identify and reduce transmission from the animal source;
- Address crucial unknowns regarding clinical severity, extent of transmission and infection, treatment options, and accelerate the development of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines;
- Communicate critical risk and event information to all communities and counter misinformation;
- Minimize social and economic impact through multisectoral partnerships.

* This can be achieved through a combination of public health measures, such as rapid identification, diagnosis and management of the cases, identification and follow up of the contacts, infection prevention and control in health care settings, implementation of health measures for travelers, awareness-raising in the population and risk communication.

Plan to scale up preparedness and operational readiness to prevent, early detect, and rapidly respond to the outbreak in the countries. WHO EMRO has advised countries to follow WHO guidelines regarding surveillance, laboratory diagnosis, clinical management, IPC in health care settings, home care for patients, risk communication and community engagement. WHO is supporting countries with fragile health systems by expediting the logistic support and strengthened laboratory capacities. WHO has dispatched additional laboratory reagents to Iran and most of the EMR countries, raising the laboratory capacities in 20 out of 22 regional countries. Remaining two countries; Djibouti and Somalia securely transport their samples to international reference laboratories for testing. Lastly, WHO HQ has also coordinated with other partners and emphasized the rapid activation of Research & Development activities during the epidemics and make available effective tests, vaccines, and medicines that can be used to save lives and avert large-scale crisis.

WHO has not recommended any travel restriction or border closure with Iran; however, many neighboring countries have closed the borders and stopped flights from Iran in order to reduce virus importation and transmission in the neighboring countries. The government of Iran has taken proactive steps to scale up the response interventions to limited the spread and contain the outbreak.

Update on outbreaks in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

CoVID-19 in 16 EMR countries; cholera in Somalia; cholera in Yemen;

Current public health events of concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2020

Afghanistan	[4 (0)]
Bahrain	[79 (0)]
Egypt	[50 (1), 2%]
Iran	[6566 (194), 2.95%]
Iraq	[61 (6), 9.84%]
Jordan	[1 (0)]
Kuwait	[64 (0)]
Lebanon	[32 (0)]
Morocco	[2 (0)]
Occupied Palestinian territory (OPT)	[19 (0)]
Oman	[16 (0)]
Pakistan	[6 (0)]
Qatar	[15 (0)]
Saudi Arabia	[11 (0)]
Tunisia	[1 (0)]
United Arab Emirates	[45 (0)]

Cholera: 2017-2020

Somalia	[11 642 (60), 0.52%]
Yemen	[2 263 304 (3 767), 0.17%]