Current major event

COVID-19 declared as Pandemic

As COVID-19 outbreak continues to spread, and now have reported from more than 180 countries/ territories/ areas globally. A total of 266,073 cases and 11,184 associated deaths (CFR 4.2%) till 20 March 2020. Now the huge number of cases are reported from European countries, accounting for 48% of the total disease burden globally.
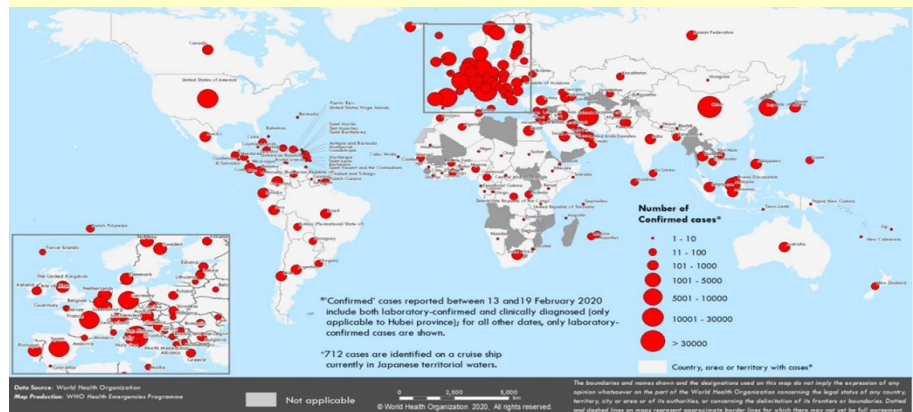
Editorial note

"Pandemic" is an escalation and "refers to an epidemic that has spread over several countries or continents, usually affecting a large number of people."

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. This declaration was associated with concerns over the geographic spread of the outbreak, (*See map*) since it affected countries on all continents. Spread and severity of COVID-19 have reached alarming levels with over 266,073 confirmed cases, and 11,184 reported deaths globally (*See table*). During the two weeks prior to this declaration, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 outside china has increased 13-fold, and the number of affected countries has tripled.

Pandemics occur when a new pathogen for which people do not have immunity emerges, acquires the capability to causes sustained human-to-human transmission, and spreads around the world beyond expectations. This has nothing to do with changes to the characteristics of a disease. There is no threshold for declaring a pandemic such as certain number of reported cases or deaths. For example, the SARS outbreak of 2013 was not declared as a pandemic despite it affected 26 countries globally.

This declaration should not trigger unnecessary global panic. "Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death", said Tedros Adhanom, Director General of the WHO. Changing the term does not result in any practical changes on what needs to be done by WHO or countries. WHO will continue to closely monitoring the spread of the virus around the clock, and provide all necessary guidance and support to the countries to scale-up their prepared-

ness and response plans. In conjunction with, countries should continue their fight to contain COVID-19 and mitigate its social and economic consequences by applying all necessary measures to stop transmission chain, and preventing cluster of cases from becoming community transmission. Several countries such as China and South Korea have demonstrated that this virus can be suppressed and controlled. However it is evident that some countries are struggling with a limited of capacity and resources, and control measures are taking a heavy toll on societies and communities, but these measures are necessary to control the pandemic.

WHO has recommended using the following transmission categories to better characterize and understand transmission patterns of COVID-19: 1) No cases 2) Sporadic cases 3) Clusters of cases and 4) Community transmission.

Finally, all countries must strike a fine balance between protecting health, minimizing economic and social disruption, and respecting human rights.

Countries, territories or areas with reported confirmed cases of COVID-19, 20 March 2020

Source: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200321-sitrep-61-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=f201f85c_2

Distribution of COVID-19 cases and deaths by WHO regions till 20 March 2020

WHO Regions	Cases	Deaths	CFR%
Western Pacific Region	94,037	3,426	3.6
European Region	128,541	6,000	4.7
South-East Asia Region	979	38	3.9
Eastern Mediterranean Region	22,355	1,466	6.6
Region of the Americas	18,877	235	1.2
African Region	572	12	2.1
International Conveyance	712	7	1.0
Global	**266,073**	**11,184**	**4.2**

Update on outbreaks
in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

COVID-19 in 19 EMR countries;

Current public health events of concern
[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), **CFR** %]

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

Afghanistan	[24 (0)]
Bahrain	[285 (1), 0.4%]
Egypt	[256 (7) , 2.7%]
Iran	[19644 (1433), 7.3%]
Iraq	[193 (14) , 7.3%]
Jordan	[69 (0)]
Kuwait	[159 (0)]
Lebanon	[163 (4), 2.5%]
Morocco	[74 (3), 4.1%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[38 (0)]
Oman	[48 (0)]
Pakistan	[461 (2), 0.4%]
Qatar	[460 (0)]
Saudi Arabia	[274 (0)]
Tunisia	[54 (1), 1.9%]
United Arab Emirates	[140 (0)]
Djibouti	[1 (0)]
Sudan	[1 (1), 100%]
Somalia	[1 (0)]