

Current major event

Disease outbreaks in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, January to December 2020

Seven countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) experienced major outbreaks of high threat pathogen diseases in the year 2020. Some of these outbreaks were continuing from previous years, while others appeared in 2020 for the first time.

Editorial note

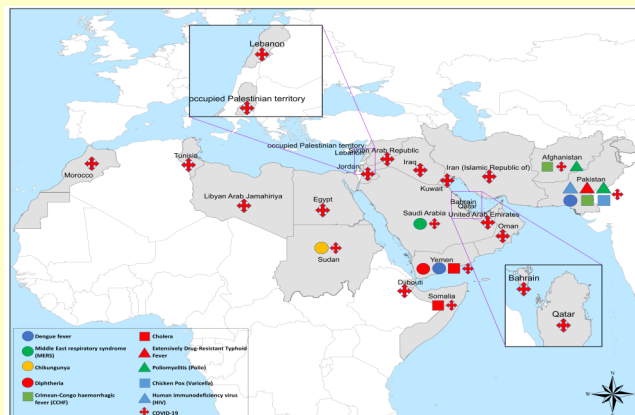
During 2020 alone, countries in the Region experienced several major outbreaks from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, with some of them turning into explosive outbreaks. Infectious disease outbreaks reported in 2020 included COVID-19, cholera, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF), chikungunya, chicken pox, dengue fever, diphtheria, extensively drug-resistant typhoid fever (XDR) typhoid, HIV/AIDS, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and poliomyelitis (*see map*).

The first cases of COVID-19 in EMR were reported on 29 January 2020 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Those first few cases were travel-related before COVID-19 started to spread and clusters of cases were reported from several countries and territories in the Region. Currently, all 22 countries of the Region are experiencing community transmission with varying levels of occurrence ranging from low to very high incidence. By the end of 2020, approximately 5 million cases and 122 181 associated deaths had been reported from the 22 countries of the Region (case fatality ratio, CFR, of 2.5%).

Pakistan remained a major centre of outbreaks experiencing HIV, dengue fever, XDR typhoid, CCHF, polio and chicken pox outbreaks during 2020. Dengue fever re-emerged that year in Pakistan with cases reported across country reaching 125 794 with 10 associated deaths. Out of these total cases, 5758 were confirmed by laboratory testing. Among those confirmed dengue cases, Sindh province (Karachi division) reported the highest number (4089), which constitutes 71% of all cases in the country; the second highest was Balochistan province (coastal districts Gwadar, Kech and Labella) at 18%.

Sudan was the second most affected country in the Region with three different infectious diseases outbreaks occurring simultaneously: chikungunya, diphtheria and viral haemorrhagic fever (VHF). The country reported 577 cases of chikungunya from 4 governorates, the most affected among which being West Darfur which reported more than 500 cases, around 86% of the total. A large outbreak of undifferentiated VHF was also

Disease outbreaks reported in EMR from January to December 2020



Extensively Drug-Resistant (XDR) Typhoid Fever cases reported in Sindh, Pakistan

Year	Karachi	Hyderabad	Other districts	Total
2016	0	12	0	12
2017	175	485	4	664
2018	3712	891	207	4810
2019	7088	1645	998	9731
2020	2510	708	415	3633
Grand Total	13 485	3741	1624	18 850

reported with more than 2908 cases and 90 associated deaths. The causative agent had not been identified by the end of the year.

MERS coronavirus (MERS-CoV) continued to circulate in the Region since 2012. A total of 57 laboratory-confirmed cases with 19 associated deaths (CFR 33.33%) were reported from Saudi Arabia last year.

Other major outbreaks reported in countries of the Region during 2020 include Somalia (cholera, 6582 cases and 33 deaths), Yemen (cholera, 230 121 cases and 84 deaths), Afghanistan (CCHF, 184 cases and 15 deaths; polio, 56 cases) and Pakistan (polio, 84 cases).

In addition to the protracted emergencies experienced by the Region, it is conceivable that other environmental factors affected the survival, reproduction and spread of high threat pathogens, as well as their vectors and hosts. These environmental factors coupled with human population movements and rapid urbanization, especially in poor urban slums, have exacerbated the frequency and severity of outbreaks in the Region in recent time. The growing interaction between humans and animals has also contributed to the resurgence of zoonotic diseases.

The implementation of a holistic strategy to minimize the occurrence and impact of emerging infectious disease outbreaks is of utmost importance. Effective prevention and control will require a good understanding of local epidemiology of the infectious diseases and adaptation of interventions to local settings.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

COVID-19 in 22 EMR countries

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

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2021

Afghanistan	[52 909 (2230), 4.2%]
Bahrain	[93 184 (352), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[5841 (61), 1%]
Egypt	[140 878 (7741), 5.5%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[1 237 474 (55 438), 4.5%]
Iraq	[597 033 (12 829), 2.1%]
Jordan	[296 668 (3877), 1.3%]
Kuwait	[151 074 (937), 0.6%]
Lebanon	[186 408 (1766), 0.9%]
Libya	[101 414 (1510), 1.5%]
Morocco	[442 141 (7452), 1.7%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[157 879 (1578), 1%]
Oman	[128 867 (1499), 1.2%]
Pakistan	[486 634 (10 311), 2.1%]
Qatar	[144 240 (245), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[362 979 (6239), 1.7%]
Somalia	[4714 (130), 2.8%]
Sudan	[26 039 (1597), 6.1%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[11 616 (723), 6.2%]
Tunisia	[143 544 (4800), 3.3%]
United Arab Emirates	[211 641 (674), 0.3%]
Yemen	[2105 (611), 29%]