

Current major event

COVID-19 strategic preparedness and response plan (SPRP): reinforcing collective readiness and response in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2021

Built on the successes and lessons learned of 2020, the new regional SPRP was developed by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean to guide the COVID-19 response in the Region in 2021, and to set strategic priorities that can reinforce collective readiness and response to the pandemic.

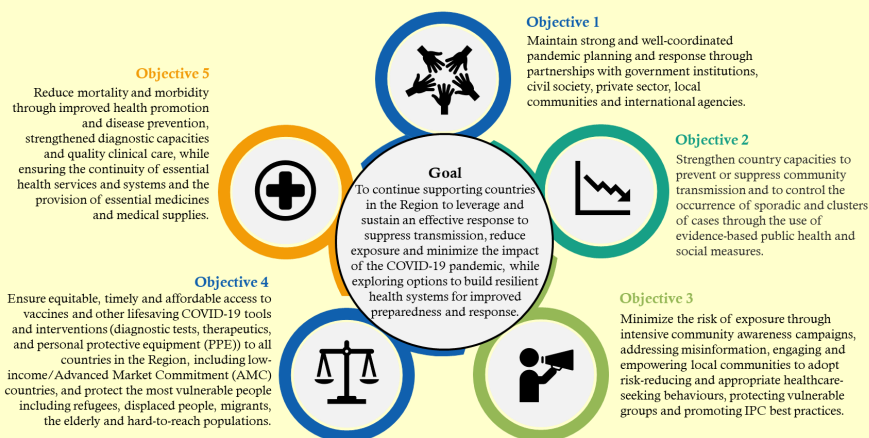
Editorial note

On 30 January 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a public health emergency of international concern. Four days later, the WHO global COVID-19 SPRP was published, followed by the first edition of this Region's SPRP to accelerate regional readiness. This latest third edition of the regional SPRP serves as an update to the July 2020 edition and is aligned with the most recent version of the global SPRP 2021, the Region's Vision 2023, and WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13) for 2019–2023.

The Region is home to 9% of the world's population and 43% of people in need of humanitarian assistance globally. The trends in COVID-19 incidence and mortality vary across the Region, in part due to variations in detection, diagnostics, reporting and response capacities of Member States, as well as demographic differences. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries have been implementing public health measures to prevent or slow the transmission of COVID-19, including individual, environmental or community measures in the form of surveillance, response, and social interventions. Levels of implementation, enforcement and adherence to these measures have varied across countries and territories in the Region. The pandemic has uncovered and intensified existing social and health inequities, and has had a major impact on essential health services.

Alongside public health and social measures to slow the spread of the virus and reduce transmission, safe and efficacious vaccines are a powerful tool to rapidly control the pandemic if a large enough proportion of the global population is vaccinated against the disease. COVID-19 vaccine roll-out has started in many countries and territories of the Region, and a decrease in cases has been observed in the United Arab Emirates since its deployment. Despite these positive preliminary observations, it is still too early for the vaccination programme to impact

Regional SPRP goal and strategic objectives for COVID-19 in 2021



transmission considering the challenges it faces, including shortage of vaccine supplies and new variants. Several SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern have been identified and preliminary evidence suggests that these variants may have increased transmissibility or be associated with reduced virus neutralization among humans.

The goal set in the regional SPRP for 2021 is "to continue supporting countries in the Region to leverage and sustain an effective response to suppress transmission, reduce exposure and minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while exploring options to build resilient health systems for improved preparedness and response" (see goal and strategic objectives above).

The SPRP identifies key lessons learned in 2020 to leverage the COVID-19 response in 2021, based on each pillar of the incident management system implemented at the regional level. It presents each pillar's areas of work and priority activities for COVID-19 preparedness and response between January and December 2021. These include strengthening multisectoral partnerships; maintaining engagement with the media; deploying medical supplies rapidly; maintaining and expanding quality PCR testing and genomic surveillance capacity; strengthening infection prevention and control at national and facility levels; strengthening intensive care unit/critical care capacity to manage severe cases; enhancing data generation, collection, management, analysis, and sharing for decision-making; performing risk assessments to inform social and travel-related measures; engaging and empowering communities; enhancing knowledge for action through priority research; supporting health care workers in maintaining or restoring essential health services; and supporting vaccine deployment and follow up.

The 2021 SPRP also has a strong monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress of the set priorities and identify gaps in the regional and country-level responses.

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	[63 598 (2745), 4.3%]
Bahrain	[199 093 (737), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[11 414 (151), 1.3%]
Egypt	[244 520 (14 269), 5.8%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[2 739 875 (76 633), 2.8%]
Iraq	[1 136 917 (15930), 1.4%]
Jordan	[723 345 (9 243), 1.3%]
Kuwait	[290 801 (1687), 0.6%]
Lebanon	[535 446 (7602), 1.4%]
Libya	[181 410 (3088), 1.7%]
Morocco	[514 817 (9098), 1.8%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[332 499 (3619), 1.1%]
Oman	[204 913 (2184), 1.1%]
Pakistan	[877 130 (19 543), 2.2%]
Qatar	[212 927 (526), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[432 269 (7147), 1.7%]
Somalia	[14 486 (753), 5.2%]
Sudan	[34 889 (2449), 7%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[23 693 (1693), 7.1%]
Tunisia	[326 572 (11 849), 3.6%]
United Arab Emirates	[544 931 (1629), 0.3%]
Yemen	[6542 (1286), 19.7%]