

## Current major event

### Respiratory Syncytial Virus in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

After easing the public health measures adopted to control COVID-19, the magnitude of respiratory viruses, such as influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), started to increase globally. This will add an additional burden on healthcare services, particularly in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable countries with weak health systems.

#### Editorial note

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a common cause of lower respiratory tract infection in all age groups. RSV infection is usually mild leading to cold-like symptoms. However, the first infection with the virus may cause severe bronchiolitis and lead to death among infants under six months of age.

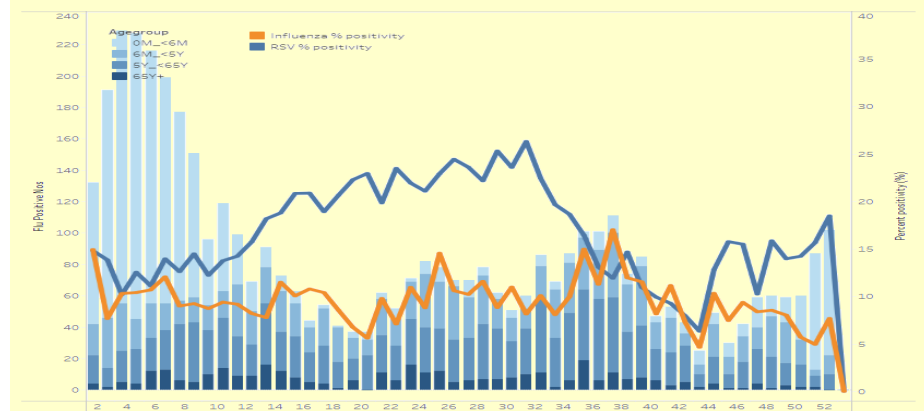
While infants and young children are the main at-risk group, older adults above 65 years, immunocompromised people and those with chronic medical conditions, such as chronic pulmonary disease, circulatory conditions, and functional disability, remain at a high risk of contracting severe RSV infections that would necessitate hospitalization.

Despite the ongoing trials, which started in 1960, there is no approved vaccine for RSV yet. Therefore, the non-pharmaceutical interventions (physical distancing, masking, and hand hygiene) remain the main protective measures against RSV infection.

The global RSV surveillance was piloted in 2015. By the end of the second pilot phase in 2023, RSV surveillance will be implemented in 25 countries, including six countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. As per the available data from the global RSV surveillance, the highest positivity rate (63%) is reported from the WHO Americas Region and the lowest (14%) is reported from the WHO South-East Asia Region. The positivity rate in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is 33%.

Yet, the RSV burden in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is not adequately documented because limited surveillance data are currently available from only four

### Age wise distribution of RSV cases globally, till 2022



countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Qatar). In addition, trend data are unreliable due to the short surveillance duration and different methods used for collecting data. Hence, comparing across these countries is challenging.

Based on the available data from the Eastern Mediterranean Region (from 1 January 2019 to 20 November 2022), children under the age of six months represent 61% of the total positive cases and males represent 57% of the total positive cases. Regarding the clinical presentation, 63% of the cases have reported a history of fever, while wheezes were reported by 29% of the total cases.

To better understand the burden, seasonality, and at-risk groups, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is closely monitoring RSV activity, especially the RSV-seasonal influenza co-circulation. The WHO regional office is also advocating for an integrated surveillance system for influenza and other respiratory viruses, such as RSV and COVID-19, to enhance the overall surveillance performance and ensure cost-effectiveness. Moreover, the regional office is supporting the Member States in collecting surveillance data and encouraging data sharing through the regional and global electronic platforms (EMFLU and FLUMART).

Furthermore, WHO's regional office is working closely with partners to build the diagnostic and testing capacities in the Region by supporting building the genomic sequencing capacity of the laboratory personnel and availing the needed equipment, supplies and multiplex kits to facilitate testing.

### 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): 2019-2022

Afghanistan	[205 641 (7833), 3.8%]
Bahrain	[695 766 (1536), 0.2%]
Djibouti	[15 690 (189), 1.2%]
Egypt	[515 442 (24 798), 4.8%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[7 559 526 (144 633) 1.9%]
Iraq	[2 463 296 (25 363), 1%]
Jordan	[1 746 997 (14 122), 0.8%]
Kuwait	[662 727 (2570), 0.4%]
Lebanon	[1 220 385 (10 734), 0.9%]
Libya	[507 084 (6437), 1.3%]
Morocco	[1 268 295 (16 284), 1.3%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[703 036 (5708), 0.8%]
Oman	[399 119 (4628), 1.2%]
Pakistan	[1 575 096 (30 630), 1.9%]
Qatar	[477 420 (685), 0.1%]
Saudi Arabia	[825 402 (9457) 1.1%]
Somalia	[27 286 (1361), 5%]
Sudan	[63 639 (4991), 7.8%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[57 394 (3163), 5.5%]
Tunisia	[1 147 072 (29 268), 2.6%]
United Arab Emirates	[1 043 798 (2348), 0.2%]
Yemen	[11 945 (2159), 18.1%]