

Current major event

Current seasonal influenza pattern in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region

With the early and strong start of the current influenza season (2022–2023) in the Northern Hemisphere, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has stepped up monitoring of the seasonal influenza activities in the Region.

Editorial note

Seasonal influenza occurs globally resulting in 3 to 6 million cases of severe illnesses and about 290 000 to 650 000 seasonal influenza-associated deaths annually. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), an estimated 2000 to 12 000 influenza-associated deaths occur yearly.

Following the previous two seasons (2020–2021 and 2021–2022) of substantially low influenza activity in the EMR, the current influenza season, which typically begins in October, started with a rapid increase in the number of positive cases across the Region (*See graph*). The past two influenza seasons, which were predominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, benefited greatly from the COVID-19 public health protection measures, such as wearing a mask, increased compliance with personal hygiene and social distancing. However, the gradual easing of COVID-19 control measures along with the waning population immunity over the past two years, has created an ideal ground for a severe return of seasonal influenza.

In the current influenza season in the Region, there has been a whopping eight-fold increase in the number of influenza positive cases, from 1117 positive cases in August 2022 (pre-season) to 9004 cases in November 2022, with the influenza positivity rates increasing from 11% to 26% over the same period. However, the number of positive cases has been declining over the past few weeks (*see graph, left figure*) compared to the global trend (*see graph, right figure*).

Seasonal influenza pattern 2022, EMR (left) and all WHO regions combined (right)



Source: [EMFLU](#)

WHO's regional office support in 2022–2023 influenza season:

WHO's regional office is providing technical and logistical support and advice to Member States to strengthen influenza and other respiratory diseases surveillance within the regional office framework of integrated surveillance. Before the influenza season kicked in, the regional office started supporting countries to be well-prepared for the influenza season. At the start of the influenza season, the regional office conducted a seasonal influenza awareness webinar where the latest influenza data from the Region and experience from the latest Southern Hemisphere influenza season were shared. The regional office also supported Member States in laboratory capacity building for improved molecular detection and genomic sequencing under the integrated surveillance framework for influenza, COVID-19, RSV and other respiratory viruses of epidemic and pandemic potential. In addition, technical missions were conducted to assist Member States in strengthening influenza vaccination programs. Technical advice was also provided to enhance and reactivate sentinel surveillance sites with improved capacities and sharing influenza surveillance data through WHO's regional platform EMFLU.

Vaccination is the most effective control measure against seasonal influenza. Safe effective influenza vaccines have been used for more than 60 years. The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean promotes seasonal influenza vaccination for people as young as six months old and above. It specifically recommends vaccination for high-risk groups such as health workers, pregnant women, individuals with underlying health conditions and older adults over 65 years old. The WHO Regional Office also recommends for the coadministration of seasonal influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations.

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	[206 236 (7834), 3.8%]
Bahrain	[696 614 (1536), 0.2%]
Djibouti	[15 690 (189), 1.2%]
Egypt	[515 456 (24 799), 4.8%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[7 559 799 (144 637) 1.9%]
Iraq	[2 464 316 (25 365), 1%]
Jordan	[1 746 997 (14 122), 0.8%]
Kuwait	[662 747 (2570), 0.4%]
Lebanon	[1 220 714 (10 739), 0.9%]
Libya	[507 100 (6437), 1.3%]
Morocco	[1 269 296 (16 285), 1.3%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[703 069 (5708), 0.8%]
Oman	[399 154 (4628), 1.2%]
Pakistan	[1 575 290 (30 632), 1.9%]
Qatar	[480 099 (685), 0.1%]
Saudi Arabia	[825 718 (9471) 1.1%]
Somalia	[27 286 (1361), 5%]
Sudan	[63 655 (4991), 7.8%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[57 405 (3163), 5.5%]
Tunisia	[1 147 154 (29 269), 2.6%]
United Arab Emirates	[1 044 704 (2348), 0.2%]
Yemen	[11 945 (2159), 18.1%]