







COVID-19: WHO EMRO Biweekly Situation Report #28

Epi Weeks 1-2 (3-16 January 2021)

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

As of midnight GMT+2, 16 January 2021

11/22	5 343 756	128 348	4 703 073	438	32.7%
					
Countries reporting increase in cases	Total laboratory-confirmed cases	Total deaths	Total recovered cases reported	Shipments delivered to 107 countries	Funding gap

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- As of 16 January 2021, countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) have reported over 5.34 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and nearly 127,790 deaths. The Region represents 5.7% of the global burden of cases reported to date, and 6.3% of global deaths attributed to COVID-19.
- Overall, the Regional trend as of last two weeks indicates an increase in reported cases and a decline in deaths with a total of 402,305 newly reported cases and 6,570 new deaths. The increase in the numbers of cases is attributed to the increase in the number of performed tests and the holiday season which saw lack of adherence in recommended social measures.
- Out of the 22 countries that reported cases last week, 7 countries reported a remarkable increase in cases, namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia while 7 countries showed a decline in deaths.
- Among the EMR countries, 8 countries surpassed the Regional case-fatality rate (CFR) of 2.4%: Yemen (29.0%), Syria (6.4%), Sudan (6.1%), Egypt (5.5%), Iran (4.3%), Afghanistan (4.3%), Tunisia (3.2%) and Somalia (2.7%).
- Infections with the new SARS-CoV-2 variants have been detected in seven (7) EMR countries, raising concerns of upsurge of cases due to increased transmissibility of the virus.
- Some countries have started rolling out COVID-19 vaccines under emergency use authorizations.

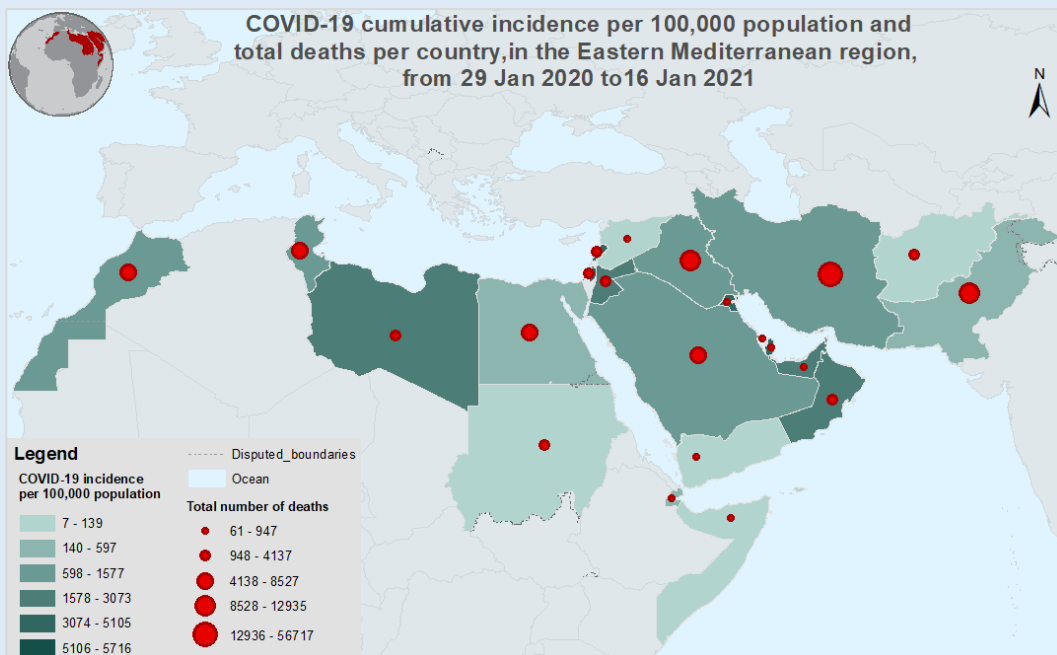
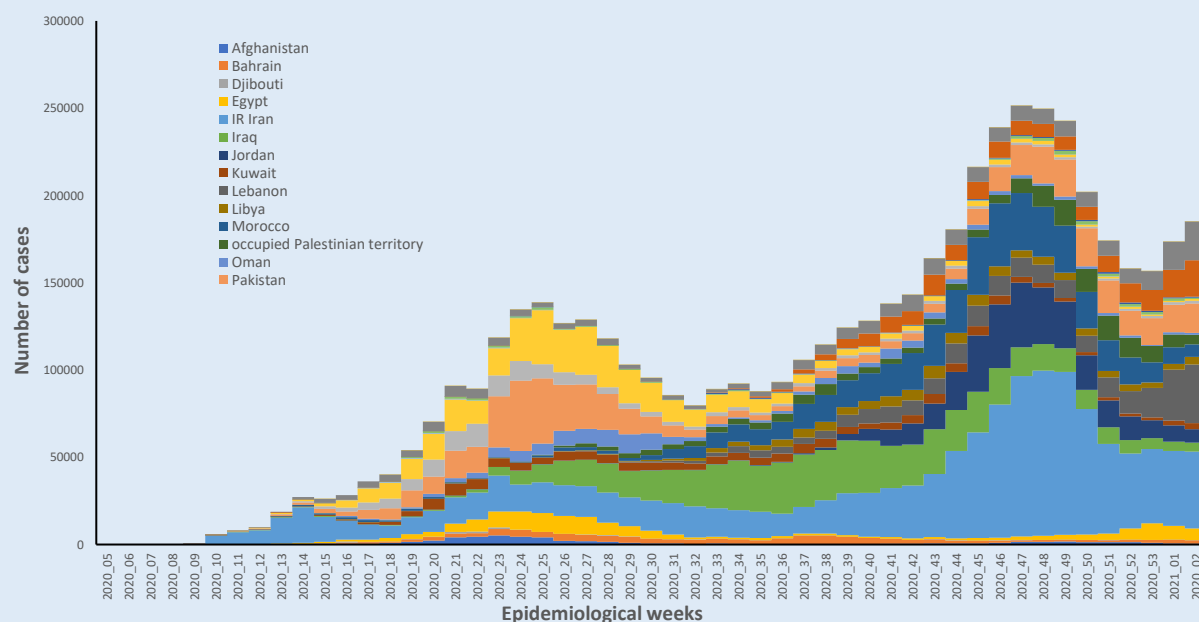


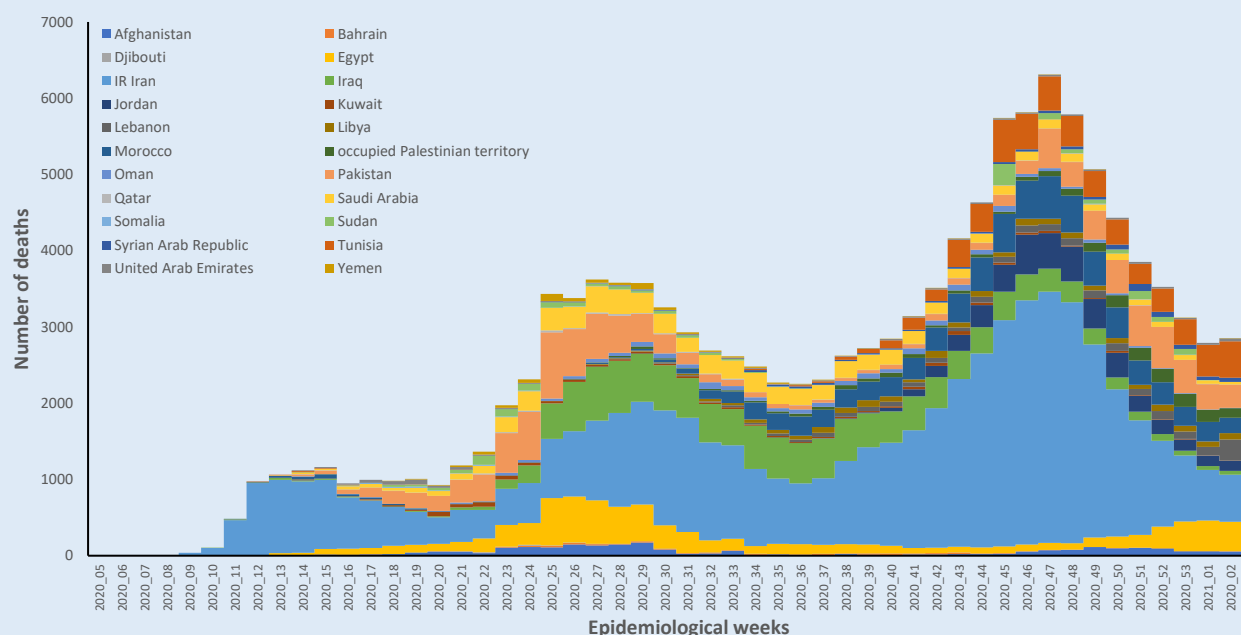
Table 1: Regional Epidemiological Situation in Numbers

Country	Confirmed Cases	Deaths	CFR	Recovered	Tests
Afghanistan	54062	2343	4.3%	45868	226263
Bahrain	97268	358	0.4%	94039	2541873
Djibouti	5903	61	1.0%	5819	104352
Egypt	155507	8527	5.5%	122291	1565849
Iran	1324395	56717	4.3%	1113224	8475495
Iraq	607587	12935	2.1%	567898	5082996
Jordan	313557	4137	1.3%	297245	3552411
Kuwait	157399	947	0.6%	150678	1389294
Lebanon	249158	2156	0.9%	151027	2363332
Libya	109088	1665	1.5%	86125	616311
Morocco	458865	7911	1.7%	433937	4709698
occupied Palestinian territory	170637	1861	1.1%	156267	959581
Oman	131264	1509	1.1%	123593	883340
Pakistan	519291	10951	2.1%	473639	7367622
Qatar	147089	246	0.2%	143612	1314424
Saudi Arabia	364753	6318	1.7%	356541	11629158
Somalia	4744	130	2.7%	3666	77652
Sudan	28233	1707	6.0%	18611	273703
Syrian Arab Republic	12942	824	6.4%	6474	55877
Tunisia	180090	5692	3.2%	128992	756252
United Arab Emirates	249808	740	0.3%	222106	23239154
Yemen	2116	613	29.0%	1421	19435
Total	5,343,756	128,348	2.4%	4,703,073	77,204,072

**Graph 1: Weekly distribution of COVID-19 cases in EMR countries
26 January 2020 – 16 January 2021**



Graph 2: Weekly distribution of COVID-19 deaths in EMR countries
26 January 2020 – 16 January 2021



IN FOCUS: NEW SARS-COV-2 VARIANTS

- Different technical pillars closely monitor the global and Regional situation concerning the new variants. To date, seven (7) EMR countries reported identifying the UK variant (B.1.1.7 UK), namely Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E.
- The Regional Office provides technical support to countries in the Region to enhance and accelerate genome sequencing for SARS-CoV-2, to detect and monitor mutations. Supporting countries to review and analyze previous data sequences and identify any abnormalities is ongoing.
- The Regional Office plans to facilitate the shipment of positive samples from some countries in the Region with no sequencing capacity to the regional reference laboratories for genome sequencing purposes.
- In reaction to the detection of variants, several EMR countries have suspended flights with the UK, and some have restricted flights to South Africa. These countries are UAE, Kuwait, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, and Jordan.


IN FOCUS: COVID-19 VACCINES

- The Regional Office tracks vaccine use, regulations, and other developments in countries of the Region and provides technical support as needed. WHO is in close collaboration with Ministries of Health to follow up and document on the number of people vaccinated and people experiencing side effects after vaccination. In addition, efforts are ongoing to improve communication between Gavi and WHO when approaching countries.
- Through the COVAX facility, WHO's Regional Office works to ensure availability of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as part of a first wave in Q1 of 2021 to selected EMR countries. Also, an additional vaccine should be made available later in Q3 and Q4 of 2021 as more vaccine become available.
- In support to vaccine demand, generation, and roll-out, a Regional Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey was implemented in all 22 EMR countries. Regional Office is providing technical support to countries and partners to develop communication products/interventions related to the vaccine and communicate to the public and priority groups about COVID-19 vaccines. A joint action plan has been developed for emergency communication, and materials received from HQ are being reviewed and shared with country offices.

REGIONAL RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Information Management /Surveillance:** An excel tracker has been created to manage information on the new SARS-CoV-2 variants within the EMR countries. Training session on Activity Info organized for Iran, Syria and Morocco WHO Country Offices.
- **Coordination and Partnership:** A pilot software and training packages for the Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) in Sudan and Jordan were launched to facilitate watch, alert, and response modes for COVID-19.
- **Essential Health Services and Systems:** A Regional online training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) was adapted to COVID-19 and the humanitarian context, targeting more than 170 participants in 8 weeks. At national levels, two policy briefs on adolescents' experiences and perspectives during COVID-19 were drafted in Jordan and Palestine. Support to essential nutrition services in Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, covering nutrition surveillance and treatments for infants and young children is ongoing.
- **Health Operations and Technical Expertise:** Discussions with the Saudi Center for Disease Prevention and Control to provide technical support to countries on external sequencing has been finalized. The National reference lab in Abu Dhabi has been identified as a Regional sequencing laboratory and they agreed to support countries with no sequencing capacities. A two-week mission to Afghanistan took place to support the Ministry of Health in enhancing infection prevention and control (IPC) measures. Support is ongoing for Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to scale up intensive care units (ICU)/critical care.
- **Risk Communication And Community Engagement:** A landscape analysis of community engagement practices and systems in the Region was conducted to assess community engagement modalities, barriers, challenges and facilitators in Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen, and to identify main entities providing public and community health services.

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Tunisia:** A critical upsurge in cases has occurred in Tunisia and the health system is saturated. Most hospitals managing COVID-9 patients have reached maximum capacity for ICU beds. As of 16 January 2021, over 180,000 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed, with nearly 5,692 deaths reported.
 - WHO is supporting Tunisia in protecting vulnerable populations and limiting the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.
 - Within the COVAX initiative, WHO and other United Nations agencies are working closely with the Ministry of Health to ensure access to the vaccine and equitable distribution to 20% of the population.
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- Improving lab testing capacities is vital in the time of COVID-19 to get accurate diagnoses. WHO Tunisia supports health authorities to improve labs efficiency.
- **Egypt:** As of 16 January, the Egyptian Ministry of Health reported 155,507 COVID-19 confirmed cases with nearly 8,527 deaths. A decline in the number of the reported cases was observed in the past two weeks.
 - WHO continues to work closely with the Ministry of Health to provide support, guidance, and recommendations for the response as well as supplies, equipment, and technical expertise.
 - WHO works with the Ministry of Health to engage community health workers in surveillance to early detect cases of COVID-19, and assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices for contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases, as well as the level of commitment to preventive measures and quarantine.
 - WHO provides the IPC preparedness and response training package for COVID-19, making these trainings available to healthcare workers in ICU, dialysis and emergency care units.
 - WHO supports the Ministry of Health programme of home isolation and adopts the contingency plan of integrating noncommunicable diseases, and mental health, and psychosocial support at the primary healthcare level.

CHALLENGES

- As winter season continues and new variants of COVID-19 have been detected, several countries are observing an upsurge in cases.
- Under-reporting from some countries results in underestimation and misinterpretation of the Regional trend.
- As vaccines are rolled out in some EMR countries, WHO and countries have to fight vaccine hesitancy and manage the inability to cover the populations' needs in terms of vaccination due to limited resources.

Regional COVID-19 [website](#)

For more information, contact emrgonCoV@who.int