

Key Messages: **UPDATED**

- **People confirmed to have COVID-19: 7** (3 new)
- **People who are presumptive for COVID-19: 22**
- **People who have tested negative for COVID-19: 152**
- **Key concern: border crossing areas in the country's west**

(Source: Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan)

Situation Overview: **UPDATED**

As of 12 March 2020, a total of 124,518 people have been confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 and 4,607 people have reportedly died across 118 countries. On 11 March, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. WHO reminds all countries and communities that the spread of this virus can be significantly slowed or even reversed through the implementation of robust containment and control activities. The increasing spread of the virus from and within Italy, Iran and South Korea remains a concern. Travel restrictions by countries are changing rapidly and should be monitored on daily basis.

On 24 February, Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) reported that one person with COVID-19 had been confirmed in the western province of Hirat. On 7 March, three people in Hirat were confirmed with the virus. On 9 March, MoPH confirmed one person with COVID-19 in the northern province of Samangan. On 10 March, MoPH confirmed two additional people with COVID-19 – one in Hirat and one in Samangan. Contact tracing for the people confirmed with COVID-19 is ongoing. It is reported that all schools in Hirat are closed and public gatherings banned until further notice. As of 8 March, MoPH is investigating 2 people presumptive for COVID-19 (see table below). The clinical condition of the people confirmed as having COVID-19 and those presumptive for the virus is good. The 2 people presumptive for COVID-19 are being kept in isolation wards. Local authorities in Hirat recently decided to move the current Paediatric Hospital (located in the eastern part of the city) to Hirat Regional Hospital, so the paediatric hospital's facilities can be used as isolation wards.

PROVINCE	CONFIRMED	PRESUMPTIVE
Hirat	5	14
Faryab	-	2
Samangan	2	-
Kabul	-	2
Parwan	-	1
Daykundi	-	1
Baghlan	-	1
Jowzjan	-	1
TOTAL:	7	22

Response **UPDATED**

The focus of activities in Afghanistan is on both preparedness and containment. MoPH is working closely with WHO, Health Cluster partners, IOM and other relevant stakeholders to rapidly expand in-country preparedness and containment capacity, to strengthen detection and surveillance capacity at points-of-entry into Afghanistan, such as airports and border-crossing sites (especially in the west), and to continue the training of medical staff on case-management, risk communication and community engagement. The level of support and activities in all key areas will need to be expanded rapidly to manage the further spread of the disease.

As of 11 March, MoPH has 1,000 screening lab tests and 501 confirmation tests available in-country. Additionally, MoPH has established five committees for the surveillance of COVID-19 at the national and provincial level: Points of Entry Committee; Population Surveillance Committee; Data Management Committee; National COVID-19 Contact Tracing Committee; and the Lab Surveillance Committee.

UNICEF has installed six temporary washing stations for returnees (citizens of Afghanistan) at screening facilities and will, in the coming days, finalise the construction of 19 permanent WASH facilities at the Islam Qala border crossing to ensure appropriate preventative measures of travellers returning from affected COVID-19 areas.

Cross Border Concerns: **UPDATED**

As of 12 March, there are 19 people confirmed to have COVID-19 in Pakistan. In Iran, health officials have reported that 9,000 people have COVID-19 and 354 people have died after contracting the virus.

IOM reports that the flow of spontaneous returnees (citizens of Afghanistan) from Iran has considerably surged in the week of 8 March primarily due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and partly tied to seasonal agricultural labour flows. During the same week, IOM reports that between 5,000 and 8,000 returnees came into Afghanistan each day. Based on data collected on people who crossed the Afghanistan-Iran border between February through December 2018, IOM has identified 25 districts at risk of the spread of COVID-19 as a result of people movements. The four main provincial areas of concern are: Hirat, Nimroz, Kabul and Ghor.

On 1 March, Turkmenistan closed its borders with Afghanistan. Whilst the border is closed for civilians' movement, it remains open for restricted commercial traffic. Similarly, on 2 March, both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan suspended flights to and from Afghanistan to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The closure of border crossings with Iran and Uzbekistan has restricted trade and Afghan imports. On 7 March, the Spin Boldak border crossing was closed by both Afghan and Pakistani border police, reportedly in connection with COVID-19. The border will remain closed until Monday, 16 March. However, Pakistan's main border crossing with Afghanistan - the Torkham border crossing - remains open.

UNFPA – with consultation of MoPH – is supporting healthcare service providers at the Torkham border crossing, the now-closed Spin Boldak border crossing, and the southwestern border crossing in Nimroz. Healthcare workers are provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) and infrared thermometers to support entry screening of people with recent travel history to COVID-19 affected areas, including Iran and China. UNFPA are currently looking to mobilise funds to support up to 50 healthcare service providers at the three border crossing sites. There is a need to secure additional stocks of PPE, such as masks and gowns, to support first responders as the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Afghanistan rises.

IOM and WHO are actively supporting response activities with MoPH to address preparedness and emergency coordination actions in the border provinces with Iran and Pakistan (Nangarhar, Kandahar, Nimroz and Hirat). Support includes: secondment of staff for cross border surveillance; material support; publication of MoPH and WHO Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials; billboards; community-level awareness raising and sensitisation efforts through health education sessions and Displacement Tracking Matrix focus group discussions; and use of IOM transit facilities as temporary isolation/quarantine spaces. Awareness raising and evidence-based sensitisation on COVID-19 facts remain key gaps and require further strengthening. IOM has also installed 55 handwashing stations in all transit facilities and is engaged in sensitisation of staff on handwashing and best practices to mitigate and prevent disease transmission.

Education

All schools in Hirat – including temporarily learning spaces (TLS) and community-based education (CBE) – are suspended until further notice to help contain the spread of COVID-19 (although public schools and universities are currently closed for winter break and are expected to resume on 22 March).

WHO Key Facts: **UPDATED**

- It is possible for people of any age to be infected with COVID-19.
- People with pre-existing medical conditions, like high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart or lung disease are more at risk of severe disease
- Older adults are more at risk of severe COVID-19 disease
- Risk of severe COVID-19 disease gradually increases with age over the age of 40 years.

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WHO Key Advice for Older Adults and People with Pre-Existing Conditions: **UPDATED**

- When you have visitors to your home, exchange “1 metre greetings”, like a wave, nod, or bow.
- Ask visitors and those you live with to wash their hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces in your home, especially areas that people touch a lot.
- If someone you live with isn't feeling well (especially with possible COVID-19 symptoms), limit your shared spaces.
- If you become ill with symptoms of COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider by telephone before visiting your healthcare facility.
- Make a plan in preparation for an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community.
- When you go out in public, follow the same preventative guidelines as you would at home.
- Stay up to date using information from reliable sources.

Coordination:

Global/Regional **UPDATED**

- WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) country support missions to Afghanistan is scheduled for 15 March. The mission team will support WHO Afghanistan in enhancing operational readiness and response measures in six major areas: surveillance and rapid response; risk communication and community engagement; infection prevention and control; and mass gathering/points of entry. The mission team will remain in-country for 10-14 days to conduct full assessment and implementation of recommendations, with the possibility for 1-2 persons to stay longer (up to 4 weeks) to continue with implementing the recommendations.

National

- WHO together with the Health Cluster has developed and is implementing a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan to complement the MoPH *Emergency Response Plan for Coronavirus 2020* and additional funding is currently being sought for this plan.
- The Inter-Cluster Coordination Team held its second meeting on Sunday, 1 March, to discuss COVID-19 response and preparedness activities. It was agreed that the current WHO preparedness plan would be updated to cover response activities and include more inter-sectoral components. This project is being led by WHO.

Sub-national

- WHO and OCHA Western Region (Hirat) are supporting the DoPH and humanitarian partners to scale-up their response to COVID-19. OCHA Afghanistan's Head of Sub-Office visited the Islam Qala border on 11 March together with UNICEF and IOM colleagues, where they met with the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) as well as partners operating at the transit centre. The objective of the visit was to observe the response and preparedness measures being implemented at the transit centre as well identify areas where further support can be provided.

Funding:

- On 24 February, EU committed €232 million for global efforts to tackle COVID-19 outbreak. Part of these funds will be allocated immediately, while some will be released in the coming months.
- According to media reports, on 25 February, the Government of Afghanistan announced the availability of US\$15 million to respond to COVID-19 outbreak and an additional US\$10 million in reserve funds for MoPH.
- On 26 February, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by the Advisory Board of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF), allocated US\$1.5 million for urgently required COVID-19 preparedness and response capacity in-country.
- On 1 March, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator released US\$15 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support global efforts to contain the COVID-19 virus. The funding will help countries with fragile health systems boost their detection and response operations.
- On 3 March, the World Bank announced an initial package of up to US\$12 billion in loans and grants in immediate support to countries coping with the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The World Bank support will prioritise the poorest countries and those at high risk with low capacity.

More Information

WHO

- WHO situation dashboard: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd>
- General information: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- Advice for public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
- Global surveillance for human infection with coronavirus disease: [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/global-surveillance-for-human-infection-with-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))
- Advice for international travel and trade: <https://www.who.int/ith/2020-24-01-outbreak-of-Pneumonia-caused-by-new-coronavirus/en/>
- Introduction to COVID-19 online course: <https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov>
- WHO Afghanistan Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/WHOafghanistan>
- COVID-19 myth busters: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
- When and how to use masks: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

- Social stigma associated with COVID-19: https://www.epi-win.com/sites/epiwin/files/content/attachments/2020-02-24/COVID19%20Stigma%20Guide%2024022020_1.pdf
- IEC material (in English, Dari and Pashtun): <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/health/documents/publication-date/2020?search=COVID-19%20Poster>

United Nations

- Medical services around the globe for UN staff: <https://hr.un.org/page/medical-services-around-globe>
- Recommendations developed by UN Medical Directors: https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/Coronavirus_RMP_2020-03-02_FINAL_0.pdf
- Information and guidelines specifically for UN personnel: <https://hr.un.org/page/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Inter-Agency Standing Committee

- Key mental health and psychosocial support considerations in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/briefing-note-about>

IATA **UPDATED**

- For the latest available information on travel restrictions, please see table and link below: <https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm>

DIRECT AIR LINKS WITH AFGHANISTAN	CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES	RELATED DEATHS	CURRENT STATUS (as of 9 March)
India	50	0	-
Iran	8,042	291	-
Kuwait	69	0	-
Pakistan	16	0	-
Saudi Arabia	20	0	Tourist visas issued to passengers arriving from Afghanistan are no longer accepted.
Tajikistan	-	-	Passengers who have transited through or have been in Afghanistan in the past 14 days are not allowed to transit or enter Tajikistan.
Turkey	-	-	-
UAE	74	0	-
Uzbekistan	-	-	Details not available on IATA

Social Media Campaign

WHO are seeking your support to help mobilize global action by joining the new campaign to urge people to “Be Ready” for the new #coronavirus, #COVID19 by sharing the latest advice to keep people safe, reassured and informed. This will be an ongoing drive to share helpful, action-driven information to protect your health and all those around you. To start, please:

- Retweet [this WHO campaign launch message](#) from your organizational and personal accounts using the following reply, or a variation:
 - *All of the @UN is joining in solidarity with @WHO, as they help the world fight #COVID19. Through Being Safe, Smart & Kind we will Be Ready for the new #coronavirus. Learn more about how to prepare at www.who.int/COVID-19*
- Share the following social media post and attached social media tile:
 - *Speed is of the essence. We must “Be Ready” for the new #coronavirus today. Look out for the most common symptoms for #COVID19: fever, dry cough & shortness of breath. Find out other ways to prepare for the virus by reading the latest @WHO advice: www.who.int/COVID-19*

*** The next update will be published on 16 March 2020 unless there is a significant change in the situation ***

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