

UNITED



NATIONS

**OFFICE OF THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR
AND HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR YEMEN**

Yemen in the eye of a COVID-19 perfect storm

Sana'a, 28 April 2020 – Aid agencies are deeply concerned by the presence, and the potential for the rapid spread of coronavirus in Yemen. To date, Yemen has been an outlier in the Eastern Mediterranean region with a single laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 declared on 10 April in Hadramaut.

“Since the first confirmed COVID case, we have warned that the virus is now in Yemen and may quickly spread,” said Ms. Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen.

“The factors are all here. Low levels of general immunity, high levels of acute vulnerability and a fragile, overwhelmed health system.”

Based on the transmission patterns of the virus in other countries, and the passing of seventeen days since the first case declaration, agencies are warning there is now a very real probability that the virus has been circulating undetected and unmitigated within communities. This increases the likelihood of a surge of cases which may quickly overwhelm health capacities.

“There’s no time to lose. People have to be informed accurately and quickly about what is happening so they can do what’s necessary to protect themselves and their families,” said Ms. Grande.

“The record is clear,” said Mr. Altaf Musani, WHO Representative in Yemen. “In countries where people are aware and warned, and where there is testing, tracing and isolation measures, transmission of the virus has been interrupted.”

In line with the International Health Regulations (article VI), announcing and managing any potential threat to global health security, including disease, is the responsibility of national authorities.

The United Nations and its front-line partners continue to advocate for necessary steps, provide guidance, and coordinate with and support health authorities to suppress transmission, prepare and equip COVID-specific hospitals and isolation units, secure supplies, identify and treat people with the virus and inform the public about the virus and how communities can protect themselves.

Yemen is the largest humanitarian operation in the world, reaching more than 13 million people each month. Nearly 80 per cent of the population requires some form of humanitarian assistance and protection. Ten million people are a step away from famine and 7 million people are malnourished. Unless funding is urgently received, 31 of the UN’s 41 major humanitarian programmes, will either reduce or shut in coming weeks. Health partners require hundreds of millions of US dollars for COVID-19 programmes.