Key Messages: UPDATED

- **People confirmed to have COVID-19: 996** (Source: Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health - MoPH)
- **Deaths from COVID-19: 33**

Key concerns: Border crossing areas, in-country testing capacity, protective equipment for frontline workers, commodity prices, floods, messaging and rumour management, international air services

Situation Overview: UPDATED

MoPH data shows that 996 people across 30 provinces in Afghanistan are now confirmed to have COVID-19. Some 133 people have recovered and 33 people have died. Of the 33 people who have died from COVID-19, 30 had at least one underlying disease, the most common of which are diabetes and cardio-vascular disease. The majority were between ages of 40-69; men between the ages of 40-69 represent 60 per cent of all COVID-19 related deaths.
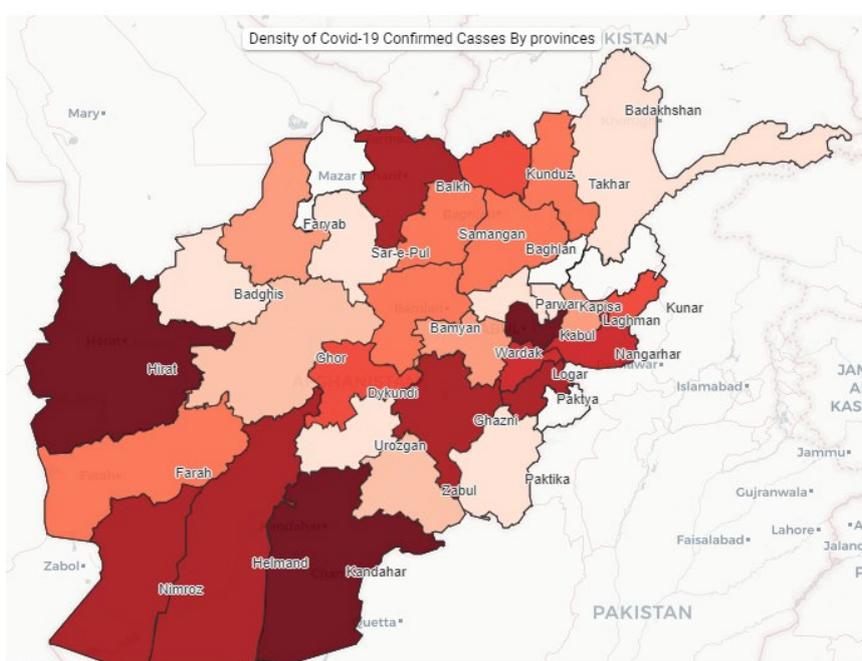
Source: MoPH

	Age 0-19		Age 20-29		Age 30-39		Age 40-49		Age 50-59		Age 60-69		Age 70-79		Age 80+		Total
	Girls	Boys	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
# people confirmed with COVID-19	37	40	86	212	50	221	37	114	35	73	12	52	3	12	3	10	997
# deaths from COVID-19	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	6	3	9	0	4	3	0	33

Cases are expected to increase rapidly over the weeks ahead as community transmission escalates, creating grave implications for Afghanistan's economy and people's well-being. Hirat is still the most affected part of the country, followed by Kabul.

There are currently eight laboratories in the country. Each lab is able to process an average of 100-150 tests per lab, per day. Additional labs in Bamyan and Badakhshan are being established and the Government hopes to have a total of 15 labs operating within the month. Currently laboratory reagents and RNA Extraction Kits are in short supply; WHO is working to source additional supplies this week but is limited by a global shortage. The Ministry of Public Health has also recently established a 20-bed ward in Surobi district to provide care for COVID-19 patients and prevent further spread of the disease.

Response: UPDATED

The Global Humanitarian Response Plan, released in March, is in the process of being updated. At the country-level, the humanitarian community has begun the process of revising of the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan in light of COVID-19. In the meantime, activities from April-June are outlined in a $108.1m *COVID-19 Multi-Sector Humanitarian Country Plan for Afghanistan*, which was released in March 2020. WHO has issued an **update** to its Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. The update provides guidance for countries preparing for a phased transition from widespread transmission to a steady state of low-level or no transmission.

The Ministry of Education has released a distance learning TV schedule to avoid the disruption of education due to school closures. Classes are scheduled to start on 25 April and will run Saturday-Thursday weekly. This will improve access to education for children who have access to televisions and electricity, however alternatives are still being explored for other children

The Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) working group has developed a collective approach to RCCE in Afghanistan. The approach will work in direct support of and in close collaboration with relevant government counterparts and includes three pillars: coordination, assessment and analysis, and development of information/messaging, feedback and distribution.

While implementing activities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, humanitarians continue to respond to other ongoing and emerging humanitarian needs. According to a recent OCHA survey, two-thirds of humanitarian organisations remain at full operational capacity and continue to deliver critical humanitarian assistance across the country.

WHO Safe Ramadan practices in the context of COVID-19

As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, new guidance released by WHO highlights public health advice for social and religious practices and gatherings during Ramadan that can be applied across different national contexts. The guidance promotes informed decision making and recommends that the cancellation of social and religious gatherings be seriously considered. Virtual alternatives are proposed where possible. If Ramadan gatherings are allowed to proceed, the following mitigation measures should be implemented:

- **Overarching considerations**:
  - Heed advice on physical distancing
  - Urge high-risk groups to avoid attending events
- **Mitigation measures for physical gatherings**
  - Venue: consider holding events outdoors; shorten the length of the event; give preference to more frequent smaller services with fewer attendees; adhere to physical distancing among attendees; regulate the number and flow of people; consider measures to facilitate contract tracing
  - Healthy hygiene: ensure handwashing facilities are adequately equipped; encourage use of personal prayer rugs over carpets; provide visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and general COVID-19 prevention messages
  - Cleaning of worship spaces: enforce routine cleaning of venues; keep mosque premises and *wudu* facilities clean; frequently clean often-touched objects
- **Charity**
  - Give special attention to those who may be adversely affected while distributing *sadaqat* or *zakah*.
  - Consider using individual pre-packaged servings of food for *iftar*
- **Well-being**
  - Fasting: COVID-19 patients may consider religious licenses regarding breaking the fast in consultation with their doctors
  - Physical activity: indoor physical movement and online physical activity classes are encouraged
- **Promoting mental and psychosocial health**
  - Ensure the faithful can still reflect, improve, pray, share and care. Ensuring that family, friends, and elders are still engaged in light of physical distance needs to be considered; encourage alternate and digital platforms for interaction.
- **Responding to situations of domestic violence**
  - In settings where movement restrictions are in place, incidents of domestic violence, particularly against women, children, and marginalised people, are likely to increase.
  - Religious leaders can actively speak out against violence and provide support or encourage victims to seek help.

Cross Border Concerns: UPDATED

Borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain open only for commercial traffic and crossings of passport holders back to Afghanistan.

As of 19 April, Johns Hopkins University reports that there are 80,868 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Iran. The Milak crossing (Nimroz) is formally open only to commercial traffic and documented citizens of Afghanistan; 788 individuals used this border crossing to return to Afghanistan over the weekend. The Islam Qala-Dogharoon land border crossings (Hirat) remain open on both sides for both individuals and commercial traffic. 2,461 people used this border crossing to return to Afghanistan over the weekend.

As of 19 April, according to Johns Hopkins University there are 7,993 people confirmed to have COVID-19 in Pakistan. On Friday, Pakistan temporarily opened its border at Torkham. 518 Pakistani nationals were facilitated to return to Pakistan; 256 citizens of Afghanistan were facilitated to return home. Following regular health screening processes, those who crossed returned to their homes. Pakistan's border is now closed to all except commercial vehicles. Pakistan is facilitating the movement of cargo trucks and containers into Afghanistan through the Torkham and Chaman border crossing points three days per week (on Monday, Wednesday and Friday). Five food trucks that had been waiting to cross from Pakistan have been cleared to cross into Afghanistan. It is hoped that the three remaining trucks will cross through on this week. Facilitation of these trucks to cross the border has mitigated potential pipeline breaks thus far. Humanitarians remain hopeful that border crossing for commercial traffic will be maintained according to the announced schedule to ensure the flow of humanitarian food and relief items from storage sites in Karachi.

Operational Issues:

A number of provinces have instituted measures to limit the exposure of residents to COVID-19. Throughout the country, these '**measured lockdowns**' have resulted in closures of sections of each city and/or movement limitations. These include limits on the number of people travelling together and the imposition of curfews. Limitations on inter-city travel have also been implemented.

Reports indicate that despite assurances by the Government that these would not limit critical program movements of NGOs and the UN, newly introduced lockdown measures continue to impact on the mobility of some staff members. Humanitarian partners continue to urge the Government to employ a national approach to these issues so that individual negotiations are not required on a case-by-case basis. The closure of government institutions due to movement restrictions may create new coordination challenges for humanitarian agencies.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) continues to make arrangements for an international airbridge. UNHAS has received an initial $3.7m in funding from the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund and is now in the process of securing flight approvals for an international service with three flights per week between Kabul and Doha. Flights into Doha will accommodate transiting passengers only. The newly secured aircraft and crew have arrived in Kabul and flights are planned to start on 21 April, with subsequent flights scheduled for 23 and 26 April, pending successful negotiations on landing permits and air space. UNHAS intends to maintain flights every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

More Information: UPDATED

WHO
- WHO's latest information on COVID-19
- WHO COVID-19 Strategy Update
- WHO COVID-19 Global Dashboard
- Interim guidance: Safe Ramadan practices in the context of COVID-19
- Interim guidance: Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 for refugees and migrants in non-camp settings

Inter-Agency Standing Committee
- IASC-endorsed COVID-19 guidance – new materials available

UN and others
- Ministry of Education: Distance learning TV schedule
- Ministry of Public Health: COVID-19 Dashboard
- Relief Web: COVID-19 Response Page
- IOM: Dashboard on impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human mobility

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