

Key Messages: **UPDATED**

- **People confirmed to have COVID-19: 13,036** (as of 2pm, 28 May. Source: Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health - MoPH)
- **Deaths from COVID-19: 235**
- **Samples tested: 34,936**

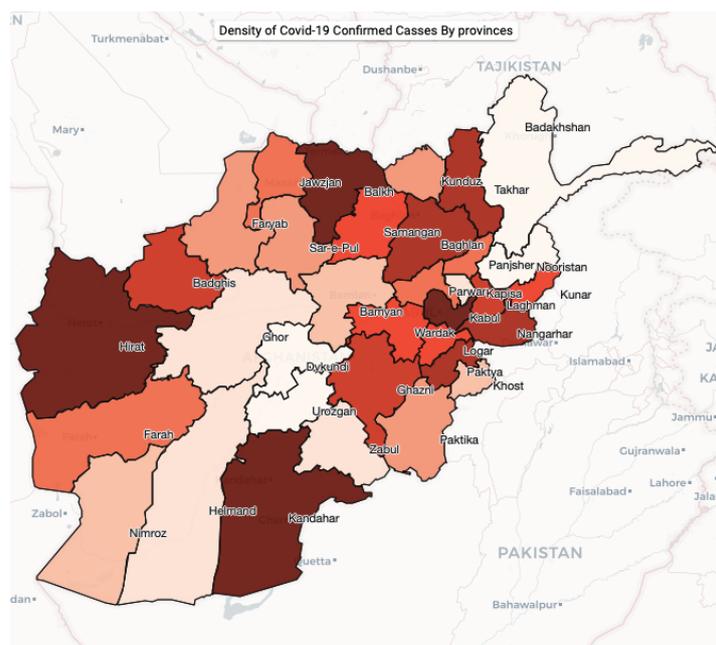
Key concerns: Border crossing areas, in-country testing capacity, protective equipment for frontline workers, commodity prices, messaging and rumour management, international air services

Situation Overview: **UPDATED**

MoPH data shows that 13,036 people across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan are now confirmed to have COVID-19. Some 1,209 people have recovered, and 235 people have died. 34,936 people out of the population of 37.6 million have been tested. 13 healthcare workers are among those who have died from COVID-19. More than seven per cent of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases are among healthcare staff. The majority of the deaths were people between ages of 40 and 69. Men between the ages of 40 and 69 represent more than half of all COVID-19-related deaths. With a fragile health system, a developing economy and underlying vulnerabilities, the people of Afghanistan are facing extreme consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic. Cases are expected to continue to increase over the weeks ahead as community transmission escalates, creating grave implications for Afghanistan's economy and people's well-being.

Kabul remains the most affected part of the country in terms of confirmed cases, followed by Hirat, Balkh, Kandahar and Nangarhar – which is emerging as a possible new hotspot. This underscores the reality that other health issues continue to affect the people of Afghanistan during the pandemic and drives home the need for support so that existing health and WASH services can continue to operate.

There have been issues with laboratories in Kandahar and Nangarhar this week that have meant they were unable to conduct tests for several days. According to WHO in the east, four out of five PCR lab technicians tested positive for COVID-19 rendering the Jalalabad PCR lab temporarily out of service and causing delays in the processing of samples. Two technicians were deployed from Kabul and the Nangarhar laboratory is now back up and running. A delegation from MoPH Kabul visited Jalalabad on 27 May where they engaged in a series of meetings to address COVID-19 challenges and gaps. Additional health staff are being trained in Jalalabad to help keep these critical services running and prevent backlogs. The Kandahar Lab remains closed.



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	314	402	831	2048	499	2094	419	1378	332	875	189	528	66	154	22	76	13036
# deaths from COVID-19	2	2	2	3	5	17	5	35	7	30	8	40	4	19	4	19	235

In Afghanistan, Health Workers Fight Misinformation to Curb COVID-19 – World Bank

SURKH-ROD DISTRICT, Nangarhar Province — Residents of the Qala-e-Naw village, which sits west of Jalalabad city in eastern Afghanistan, became frantic when they first heard about COVID-19 and the havoc it could wreak on people's health. Many turned to antibiotics to ward off the disease—despite their ineffectiveness over viruses. Taking a course of antibiotics was also the chosen line of defense for Qamara, a mother of six, and her family—until she sought advice from health workers and changed her mind. "They told me not to take any medication without a doctor's prescription," she says.

The threat of COVID-19 looms large in Afghanistan. But [misinformation about the disease has spread even faster](#). With less than half of the population being literate, most people in Afghanistan lack proper access to electronic forms of communication, making it difficult to disseminate COVID-19 advisories and prevention messages. Anecdotes and unfounded evidence about the pandemic circulate quickly among communities, skewing perceptions and resulting in non-compliance with health instructions and medical guidelines.

To raise awareness and dispel myths about the pandemic, health specialists from the government's livelihood support program, *Targeting the Ultra Poor* (TUP), have joined forces with influential community elders in villages across three districts of the Nangarhar province. Najibullah, a TUP health specialist, met with the community elders of Qala-e-Naw village and explained how taking unprescribed medicine for COVID-19 could trigger adverse side effects. Through this engagement, Najibullah and his colleagues were successful in keeping more residents from taking unnecessary antibiotics.

They also described precautionary measures recommended by Afghanistan's MoPH and WHO, such as physical distancing and the proper use of face masks. Now, mullahs and other community leaders are disseminating COVID-19 prevention messages to villagers in community gatherings and mosques, while also observing these best practices. The village is also learning to make masks from washable fabric that can be re-used.

"They advised us to use masks and gloves and wash our hands frequently with soap and water," says Qamara. "We've learned that if anyone feels sick, they should stay home and contact a doctor if their symptoms worsen. We have also learned that COVID-19 spreads from one person to another, so we have to wear a mask and keep a distance of at least one meter from each other."

As part of the World Bank's [Afghanistan Access to Finance Project](#), TUP aims to improve the economic conditions of destitute families through livelihood support. Like other World Bank and [Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund](#) (ARTF) projects, TUP has been scaled-up to help limit COVID-19 outbreaks, spread life-saving messages, and help communities cope with the social and economic impacts of the virus.

The World Bank continues to support the government in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, it has provided US\$100.4 million in emergency support to the government.

[Cross Border:](#) **UPDATED**

The Milak crossing (Nimroz) is officially open to commercial traffic and documented citizens of Afghanistan. The Islam Qala-Dogharoon land border crossings (Hirat) remain open on both sides for documented travellers and commercial traffic. According to the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), a total of 8,167 citizens of Afghanistan returned from Iran through the Milak and Islam Qala borders between 17 and 23 May, a 3 per cent increase from the previous week (7,923). 4,430 people returned voluntarily and 3,737 were deported from Iran. IOM has provided post-arrival humanitarian assistance – including COVID-19 awareness orientation sessions – to 2,877 people (35 per cent of all undocumented citizens of Afghanistan returning from Iran) at its transit centres in Hirat and Nimroz during the past week.

Afghanistan's frontier with Pakistan at Spin Boldak and at Torkham remains mainly closed due to COVID-19-related restrictions, however on 16 May, the Government of Pakistan announced that passenger movements of stranded nationals of Afghanistan and Pakistan are officially allowed once a week (Saturday) with a maximum of 500 people allowed to cross through Torkham and 300 through Spin Boldak to facilitate return to their respective countries. Prior to the end of Ramadan and the start of the Eid holiday, the border witnessed a higher than usual surge in returns as people began travelling home to their families. Pakistan continues to facilitate the movement of cargo trucks and containers into Afghanistan. On 16 May, the Government of Pakistan announced that the Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points would open six days a week (except for Saturday) for commercial purposes. An unlimited number of trucks will now be allowed to pass per day. Humanitarians emphasise the critical importance of maintaining a reliable flow of traffic for

humanitarian cargo and are advocating for special consideration to expedite humanitarian food and relief items through border crossings.

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

Operational Issues: **UPDATED**

The Government of Afghanistan announced on 2 May that it was extending the **nationwide lockdown** in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. Current nationwide lockdown measures are being reviewed. A number of provinces have already eased their lockdowns, including Kandahar, Hilmand and Ghazni, Badakhshan, Balkh, Khost, Paktya, Kunduz and Takhar provinces. A number of provinces in the East of the country continue to enforce stricter lockdowns (Laghman, Kunar) and there are signs that greater physical distancing is now being observed in Nangarhar due to increases in people showing possible symptoms.

On 23 May, MoPH announced that strict measures had been put in place during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays in Kabul to enforce the lockdown in the city. After the holidays, on 26 May, the government in Kabul issued a new plan to ease the COVID-19 lockdown, which proposes the use of an 'odds-and-evens' approach to allowing people to head back to work and enjoy other activities after weeks of lockdown. According to the plan, starting from 27 May, private vehicles will be allowed to run on an odd-even basis, alternating days according to the last digit of their license plates (i.e. vehicles with odd numbers as last digits of their license plates will be allowed to drive on odd days of the month and the same applies to even numbers and respective days). Humanitarian personnel, who have received permission to continue their duties amid the movement restrictions, as well as under the odd-even rationing system, are encouraged to monitor the situation closely. Reports indicate that despite assurances from the Government that the lockdowns would not limit critical program movements of NGOs and the UN, the measures continue to impact the mobility of humanitarian organisations, delaying the delivery of assistance and affecting access to humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian partners remain active in responding to crises throughout the country and continue to urge the Government to employ a national approach to these movement issues so that individual negotiations are not required on a case-by-case basis. For additional information on access constraints, please see the [C-19 Access Impediment Report](#).

On 2 May, the Government of Afghanistan announced the suspension of all commercial domestic flights until the end of June. Kam Air recently announced that it will facilitate exceptional domestic flight operations during the suspension period to three locations: Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Hirat. The flights began operation on 7 May with one flight to Mazar-e-Sharif. The next roundtrip flights are scheduled to depart from Kabul to Hirat on 29 and 30 May.

On 17 May, [Qatar Airways](#) announced plans for special Doha-Kabul flights. Flights into Doha will connect passengers to further destinations through the Qatar Airways network. The next and final round-trip charter will be departing from Doha to Kabul and back to Doha on 30 May.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) airbridge connecting Kabul and Doha is operating regularly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. Flights into Doha accommodate transiting passengers only. This service is planned to continue until regular commercial international flights resume. The next flight is planned for Tuesday, 2 June. UNAMA is also considering the possibility of planning a special flight to Frankfurt to support UNAMA personnel and the humanitarian community (UN Agency and NGO personnel, donors, diplomats) in Afghanistan. The flight will depart from Kabul to Frankfurt on 9 June and then return back to Kabul from Frankfurt the following day.

More Information – Links: **UPDATED**

WHO

- [WHO's latest information on COVID-19](#)
- [WHO COVID-19 Global Dashboard](#)
- [WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19](#)

Government of Afghanistan:

- [Ministry of Public Health: COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

Inter-Agency Standing Committee

- [IASC-endorsed COVID-19 guidance – new materials available](#)
- [Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak](#) (available in [English](#), [Dari](#), [Pashto](#))

UN and others

- [UN: Global Humanitarian Response Plan: COVID-19 \(April – December 2020\) – GHRP May Update](#)
- [Relief Web: COVID-19 Response Page](#)
- [OCHA: Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan For COVID-19 Pandemic 2020](#)
- [OHCHR: Joint Guidance Note on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Human Rights of Migrants](#)
- [UNDRR WHO: Risk communication and countering the 'Infodemic'](#)
- [Geneva Call: Covid-19 and armed non-State actors](#)
- [ICRC: Call by global leaders - work together now to stop cyberattacks on the healthcare sector](#)
- [UNHCR: Global COVID-19 Emergency Response](#)
- [UNEP: Building Back Better with Natural Resources](#)
- [EC, WHO, FIFA: #SafeHome campaign](#)

- UNEP: COVID-19 - Four Sustainable Development Goals that help future-proof global recovery
- IFRC, UNFPA: COVID-19 - Working with and for young people
- ICRC, OCHA: Op-Ed on explosive weapons in populated areas and Covid-19
- ICRC: COVID-19 and violence against health care
- UNDP, UNCDF: improve flow of remittances and counter socio-economic impacts of COVID-19
- Save the Children, UNICEF: Children in monetary poor households and COVID-19 (technical note)
- UNICEF, WHO: Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes – National Implementation of the International Code
- ILO: Safe return to work: Guide for employers on COVID-19 prevention
- ILO: COVID-19 and the world of work
- ICRC, IFRC: Reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on internally displaced people (IDPs)
- OCHA: Asia Pacific COVID-19 - Humanitarian Data Portal
- ICRC + 5 more: Health care workers save lives – Condemnation of attacks linked to COVID-19
- UN Women: Gender Alert Issue V - Maintaining services for survivors of violence against women and girls during COVID-19
- UNICEF: Deafening silence and uncertainty in Afghanistan

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