

Key Messages:

- **People confirmed to have COVID-19: 1**
- **People who are presumptive for COVID-19: 24**
- **People who have tested negative for COVID-19: 53**
- **Key concern: border crossing areas in the country's west**

(Source Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan)

Basic principles to reduce the general risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections include:

- Avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections.
- Frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals.
- People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).
- In case of symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness either during or after travel, travelers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share their travel history with their health care provider.

Situation Overview:

As of 2 March 2020, a total of 88,913 people have been confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 and 3,043 people have reportedly died across 62 countries. On 28 February, WHO increased its assessment of the risk of spread and the risk of impact of COVID-19 to “very high” at the global level – its top level of risk assessment – while stressing that there still is a chance of containing the virus if its chain of transmission is broken. The daily number of new people confirmed to have COVID-19 in China has been stabilising, however since 26 February more people with COVID-19 have been reported outside China. Furthermore, 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. The person had recently travelled from Qom in Iran. It is reported that all schools in Hirat are closed and public gatherings banned until further notice. As of 2 March, MoPH is investigating 24 people presumptive for COVID-19 (all in Hirat province). The clinical condition of the person confirmed and those presumptive for COVID-19 is good. All 24 people presumptive for COVID-19 are being kept in isolation wards.

Response

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 2 March, MoPH has 1,600 screening tests and 150 confirmation tests available in-country. Additionally, MoPH has recently 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.

60 UNICEF-supported MHTs are on stand-by across 13 provinces to provide primary health care services in potentially affected areas. In an effort to raise awareness of water, sanitation and hygiene steps to contain the spread of COVID-19, UNICEF, the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), World Vision International (WVI), International Medical Corps (IMC), Relief International (RI) and Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR) have dedicated surge capacity to be able to carry-out awareness campaigns at both community and school-level. This dedicated capacity can swiftly be deployed to border-crossing sites with Iran and Pakistan.

Cross Border Concerns

As of 2 March, there are four people confirmed to have COVID-19 in Pakistan. In Iran, health officials have reported 978 people have COVID-19 and 54 people have died after contracting COVID-19 as of 2 March.

On 1 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 for seven days. However, Pakistan's main border crossing with Afghanistan - the Torkham border crossing - remains open.

IOM reports that there has been a higher number of spontaneous returnees (citizens of Afghanistan) from Iran during recent days as many labour camps have been closed due to the rapid spread of COVID-19. Awareness raising and evidence-based sensitisation on COVID-19 facts remain key gaps and require further strengthening.

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.

Education

The Ministry of Education is working closely with MoPH to develop IEC posters for hygiene and sanitation promotion to be distributed in schools across the country. Similarly, the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG) is currently working on developing public information campaigns on preventive measures against COVID-19 to be distributed through schools, community shuras, parents' associations and teachers. As part of this effort, UNICEF will print and distribute 800,000 IEC leaflets. 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 will resume on 22 March).

In Focus – FAO Key Messages Related to Animals and COVID-19:

- While there is ongoing speculation on the likely animal origin of COVID-19, to date, the spread and development of the current human epidemic is due to human-to-human transmission.
- People should not handle, slaughter, dress, sell, prepare or consume meat that originates from wild animals or livestock that are sick or that have died from unknown causes. When visiting live animal markets, wet markets or animal product markets, general hygiene measures should be applied. These include regular hand washing with soap and potable water after touching animals and animal products, as well as avoiding touching the eyes, nose or mouth, and avoiding contact with sick animals or spoiled animal products.
- Raw, wild meat or uncooked dishes based on the blood of wild animals should not be consumed. These practices place people at high risk of contracting any number of infections. Meat from healthy livestock that is cooked thoroughly remains safe to eat.
- Any unusual morbidity or mortality of animals should be reported to the animal health authorities.
- FAO is working with partners to assist member countries and research communities in identifying potential animal hosts of this virus and reduce spillover to humans.

Coordination:

Global

- On 24 February WHO HQ convened a meeting in Geneva with the participation of UN Secretary-General on COVID-19. The outbreak is evolving and all countries are being advised to set aside funds to prepare for and respond to a severe scenario. WHO personnel have completed their mission to China and provided 80 recommendations to the Government.

Regional

- A Regional Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group (RCCE) was established as part of the response mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region, co-chaired by WHO, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) is continuing to compile 4W (Who does What, Where, When) data from humanitarian partners across the region. When completed, the 4Ws will help to understand the existing Risk Communication and Community Engagement modalities in the region as well providing an analysis of gaps to enable community-led response.
- A WHO regional office team will travel to Iran in the coming days to provide support to the Government on COVID-19 preparedness and response activities.

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 – particularly in the west. 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

- OCHA and WHO Western Region (Hirat Office) are working closely with local government authorities, the Emergency Preparedness and Response Committee under the Directorate of Public Health, as well as partners operating in the area to contain the spread of the outbreak.
- In the country's north, the Health Cluster and MoPH met on 27 February to begin drafting a local preparedness plan for the northern region as well as to identify immediate medical equipment gaps at the provincial level. The DoPH plans to establish two additional isolation centres in the immediate future, bringing the total number of isolation centres in Mazar-e-Sharif to three.
- On 26 February, UN, NGOs, and Red Crescent partners working in the west met with local health officials in Hirat to discuss preparedness and response actions.
- The western region sub-national EiEWG will call partners for a meeting in the coming days to discuss preparedness planning ahead of the re-opening of schools, Community-Based Education, and Temporary Learning Spaces in Hirat.

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.
- 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, which has been released to WHO and UNICEF, will help countries with fragile health systems boost their detection and response operations.
- 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.

More Information

WHO

- WHO situation dashboard: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd>
- How to protect yourself against COVID-19: <https://youtu.be/1APwq1df6Mw>
- General information: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- 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))
- Global research on coronavirus disease: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>
- Advice for public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
- Infection prevention and control during health care: [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/infection-prevention-and-control-during-health-care-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected-20200125](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/infection-prevention-and-control-during-health-care-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected-20200125)
- 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 (incl. translated IEC material in Dari and Pashtun): <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

IATA

- For the latest available information on travel restrictions, please refer to this link from IATA: <https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm>

United Nations

- Medical services around the globe for UN staff: <https://hr.un.org/page/medical-services-around-globe>

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