

10 June 2020 – More than 7 million cases of COVID-19 have now been reported to WHO globally, and more than 400 000 deaths. As of yesterday evening, countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have reported a total of almost 670 000 cases and more than 15 000 deaths, making up almost 10% of the global caseload.

While cases across Europe are decreasing – and the global media is reflecting less alarm as a result – the number of cases in other parts of the world continues to increase, including in our Region. In fact, at the regional level, we have observed a regular increase of daily cases reported, with an acceleration during the past 3 weeks.

Over the past week, more than half of all new cases in our Region were reported in Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Several more countries are reporting increasing numbers of cases. This is a worrying development, and country support teams within our Regional Incident Management Support Team structure are working with all countries to monitor and respond to the situation.

As many countries in our Region start to ease restrictions, there is a risk that cases will continue to increase. WHO urges all countries easing restrictions to ensure that these measures are implemented following evidence-based risk assessments. Without proper precautions and monitoring, there is a real threat of COVID-19 resurging in countries that are seeing a decrease in the number of cases.

A key measure that almost all countries in the Region have put into place is the public use of masks. Earlier this week, WHO released new guidance on the use of masks based on our evolving research on COVID-19. This guidance was developed through a careful review of all available evidence, and extensive consultation with international experts and civil society groups.

As the search for treatment continues, no pharmaceutical products have yet proven to be safe and effective for the treatment of COVID-19. Recently, hydroxychloroquine was reinstated into the Solidarity trial after a temporary pause. More than 100 countries are now participating in the trial, including Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Pakistan and Kuwait from our Region, with Jordan in the process of joining. Overall, about 40 hospitals from the Region are included in the Solidarity trial.

WHO continues to work with partners and countries to fight COVID-19. We are coordinating the global and regional response, helping countries, speeding up research and development, and communicating with people on how they can protect themselves and others. We have delivered essential supplies to protect health workers and patients in 133 countries around the world, including in all countries of our Region, and delivered 1.5 million test kits to 129 countries. We are continuously developing updated technical guidance, and training health workers and other frontline responders.

We will not stop until the virus has been beaten, and we urge all countries and communities to stay alert and ensure that all proper measures are strictly followed.

More than 6 months into this pandemic, this is not the time for any country to take its foot off the pedal. This is the time for countries to continue to work hard, on the basis of science, solutions and solidarity. The cornerstone of the response in every country must be to find, isolate, test and care for every case, and to trace and quarantine every contact. That is every country's best defense against COVID-19.

Most people globally and in our Region are still susceptible to infection. We continue to urge active surveillance in all countries, to ensure the virus does not rebound, especially in mass gatherings of all kinds which are starting to resume in some countries.

Every single person has a role to play in ending this pandemic, and we count on you, the media, as our partners to highlight the importance of this among the public. Without proper community awareness and continued healthy behaviours, there is a real threat of COVID-19 cases increasing in countries that are now seeing a decrease in the number of cases.

As we hear of positive or suspected cases among our families, friends, and communities, and I urge you all to play a positive role and highlight the need for support, respect, and kindness towards those who may be affected. I also want to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to health workers on the frontlines of this fight, and urge all countries to support them and ensure their protection.

While this pandemic may have separated us physically, we need to stay connected through these simple gestures that reflect our common humanity.

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