



25 March 2020, Riyadh — The World Health Organization (WHO), with support from Saudi Arabia, is working to combat COVID-19 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and beyond.

On 23 March, Saudi Arabia helped airlift WHO medical equipment and supplies from WHO's logistics hub in Dubai to Aden, Yemen. The shipment, which included personal protective items for health workers, laboratory screening tests, trauma medication and other medical supplies, will be distributed to Sana'a and Aden to support readiness for COVID-19, as well as the humanitarian response to the ongoing conflict. Earlier on 9 March, Saudi Arabia delivered a shipment of medical equipment to Wuhan city in China.

In response to an urgent WHO appeal, Saudi Arabia is also donating US\$ 10 million to support all countries of the Region in their national COVID-19 response to combat the spread of the disease. An additional US\$ 10 million is in the process of being donated to provide WHO Yemen with essential equipment and supplies as part of Yemen's national readiness and response plan.

"Infectious diseases such as COVID-19 know no borders. We have seen how a public health threat in one country can quickly affected entire regions and spread to become a global pandemic. This funding will help WHO intensify its efforts as it takes regional and global action to combat the spread of the disease," says Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

With cases of COVID-19 also reported within Saudi Arabia, the country's Ministry of Health is

scaling up surveillance and testing measures. All suspected cases are investigated, particularly at points of entry, and confirmed cases are immediately isolated and treated. The Ministry has designated 25 hospitals, amounting to 80 000 hospital beds and 8000 intensive care unit (ICU) beds, for the treatment of COVID-19 cases. 2200 beds have been designated for the isolation of suspected/quarantined cases.

Based on its experience with other coronaviruses such as MERS-CoV, in early January Saudi Arabia developed country-specific guidelines based on WHO guidelines to deal with the new virus. The country is also drawing from its unique expertise in managing mass gatherings and emergency preparedness during the annual hajj pilgrimage.

To stop the spread of COVID-19, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health is reaching out to the press and the public through all possible outlets, especially on social media. The country has also produced 'Your Ultimate Guide to COVID19' to give citizens and residents access to COVID-19 facts and precautionary messages in 12 languages. Actions to engage the public in prevention and control activities, and to combat rumors and false information about the disease, have been significantly scaled up.

"As the world holds its breath, WHO and its member states are working with all possible speed to prevent the spread of this disease, especially to countries where health systems are frail. We acknowledge the efforts of Saudi Arabia in the prevention and control of COVID-19 by adopting a "Whole of Government" approach as recommended by WHO for their national response to COVID19. Saudi Arabia has taken all precautionary measures including preparedness, detecting, testing, tracing and isolation.

We are grateful to Saudi Arabia and other donors and partners for urgently stepping in to ensure that all action is taken during this critical window of opportunity to contain the outbreak. We cannot fail," stresses Dr Ibrahim El-Ziq, WHO Representative in Saudi Arabia.

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