Baghdad, Iraq, 29 June 2020 – The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Iraq, today began a major COVID-19 awareness-raising campaign targeting people living in high-risk and heavily affected areas in the Iraqi capital Baghdad.

The campaign will mobilize more than 250 community volunteers to deliver critical information, education and communications materials to approximately 6 million people living in 10 heavily populated districts for 4 weeks from 29 June to 28 July 2020.

"Health is the responsibility of all, and raising people's awareness is essential to containing the aggressive spread of COVID-19," said Dr Adham R. Ismail, WHO Representative in Iraq. "WHO, the Ministry of Health, partners and donors are working hand in hand to fight this pandemic, and until a vaccine is developed we have to unite our efforts to flatten the curve and keep our communities healthy and safe," he added.

The campaign will use mobile screens, booths and mobile medical clinics to display WHO educational videos and audio messages on a variety of protective and disinfection measures. State and private radio and TV channels will support the campaign with daily messages for the month. In addition personal protection packages containing masks, hand sanitizers, campaign slogan T-shirts and caps, COVID-19 awareness-raising flyers and other educational materials will be distributed to people in public places, main streets and bazaars.

Iraq recently reported a significant increase in the number of cases in Baghdad after lockdown measures were eased nationwide. Health authorities have tied the increase in numbers to increased testing capacity and improved active surveillance and weak adherence of people living in crowded districts to adopting protective measures as recommended by WHO and the Ministry of Health, such as practising good hand hygiene and social distancing and wearing masks.

The campaign includes support from key religious figures who have mobilized thousands of mosques in the capital to disseminate audio messages. "With no cure yet but prevention, we have to continue educating our people on the importance of following the health advice of WHO and the national health authorities to save our lives and protect our health workers," a cleric attending the campaign opening in Sadir City, where the vast slums of eastern Baghdad are located, commented.

"WHO is aware of the challenging impact of the lockdown and movement restrictions on the limited and daily income which families in many areas in Baghdad earn. However, the Organization urges all individuals to follow safety measures and wear masks in gatherings and public places, keep hands clean, and pratise social distancing to stop transmission of the virus," Dr Adham stressed.

WHO would like to extend its thanks to the Government of Kuwait and the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) for co-funding this campaign, and to WHO's implementing partner the United Iraqi Medical Society for supporting its implementation.

Related links

Early COVID-19 preparation saves lives in Iraq

The fight to contain COVID-19 in Iraq

WHO supports Iraqi health authorities to combat COVID-19

WHO conducts remote psychological first aid training in Iraq to address COVID-19 stigma and discriminatory behaviours

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