

Baghdad, Iraq, 31 May 2020 – Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has fought the pandemic with every tool at its disposal to save lives and support countries with limited COVID-19 response capacity, including Iraq.

WHO and Iraqi health authorities proactively coordinated a comprehensive response to the pandemic as early as January 2020. WHO Iraq scaled up the country's readiness and response operations mechanism, as well as its pandemic preparedness plan of action.

"The Government of Iraq, with the full support of WHO, mobilized resources at an early stage of the pandemic to contain its transmission," said Dr Adham R. Ismail, WHO Representative in Iraq. "National, regional and local authorities implemented strong measures to reduce the number of cases and suppress the rapid spread of the virus."

Before Iraq's first COVID-19 case was reported on 24 February 2020, WHO coordinated with several important actions taken by the Ministry of Health at both central and regional level. These early actions included enhancing coordination and planning among all stakeholders and partners at national and international levels, communicating with communities about the risks and how people could protect themselves, and ensuring capacity was in place to find, isolate, test, trace every contact, and treat every case.

On 9 March, a joint technical team from the WHO Regional Office and WHO headquarters arrived in Iraq to assess the capacity of the Iraqi Ministry of Health and health facilities on disease detection and case management. The team provided guidance to address gaps and improve the health measures taken by the government. Designated hospitals were prepared to respond to a potential spike in cases, and health workers were trained on infection prevention and case management.

WHO support to the national health authorities also included active surveillance, situation assessment and analysis, and awareness-raising sessions targeting first-line staff at border points and airports. 1800 Ministry of Health mobile teams carried out social mobilization campaigns and distributed WHO awareness material all over Iraq.

Rapid response teams were mobilized to carry out country-wide awareness raising, contact tracing, and testing activities, including disseminating infection prevention and control messages and guidelines.

Case management and continuity of essential services, in addition to logistics, procurement and supply management were among the priority actions.

The provision of laboratory services was also a focus. Direct cooperation between WHO and the COVID-19 Crisis Cell of Basra University succeeded in April 2020 in producing urgently-needed laboratory supplies to speed up the testing of suspected cases. This significant achievement was later replicated by other countries in the Region.

WHO lead a series of activities encouraging adherence to the lockdown and avoidance of mass gatherings that could lead to an increase in the numbers of cases. In March, the WHO Representative visited the religious Supreme Seminary in Najaf and recommended the postponement of religious gatherings. “WHO commends the stance of the Supreme Seminary in support of WHO and Ministry of Health recommendations and commends its positive response in encouraging the people of Iraq people to follow health preventive measures and recommendations,” said Dr Ismail.

Tuesday 23rd of April 2024 05:59:02 PM