

9 September 2020 - In July 2020, WHO Iraq collaborated with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and community police, as well as WHO's implementing partner, the United Iraqi Medical Society (UMIS), to conduct community sensitization campaigns and engage with communities on COVID-19. This response follows evidence obtained from the Ministry of Health that showed an increase in the number of community transmissions in the country. The campaign, initially meant to run for one month in Baghdad, was later rolled out to five other governorates of Sulymania, Basra, Wasit, Thi Qar, and Misan for a couple of months. This campaign targeted more than 15 million people in all the six governorates.

The campaign dubbed "Your health is important" was conducted in selected districts each running for 3 days. Two hundred and fifty (250) volunteers participated in the campaign, conducting sensitizations and community awareness sessions using booths, mobile screens, and mobile clinics to display educational videos and play audio messages on a variety of COVID-19 protective measures. The volunteers also distributed facemasks, hand sanitizers, and flyers and informed the public of the importance of wearing and using them respectively, practicing physical distancing, and frequent hand washing. Prominent community entities/leaders who participated in this campaign included the media, religious leaders, athletes, artists, and other professionals.

WHO Iraq features photos of beneficiaries of its efforts, as they disseminated health messages to communities in order to help them stay protected from COVID-19.

Al-Sadr city



Abbas educates other drivers about the dangers and prevention of COVID-19 in Al-Sadr city in Baghdad. Thirty-year-old Abbas *Mustafa is a taxi driver whose job involves driving passengers to all parts of Baghdad city. Abbas is a married man with two children; he is the support pillar to his parents and siblings. Abbas's parents are old, and have some underlying health conditions. He is worried about contracting COVID-19 while doing his job despite taking all the precautionary measures. The worry is high because some of his colleagues are not adhering to the recommended standard operating procedures. As part of his community responsibility, Abbas

engages in health talks from time to time with the community on the dangers of COVID-19, encouraging his fellow drivers and community members to wear facemasks while observing social distancing as a preventive measure of COVID-19.

Abbas is, however, worried not just for himself but his parents and the broader community because, according to him, people are reluctant because they think that this disease is politically motivated and a gimmick. Abbas says this endangers the lives of those who are working hard to stay protected. He welcomed WHO, MOH, and their implementing partner to their community, asking them to reinforce messages on prevention so that his community remains safe.

Maysan governorate



Ahmed Ali speaking to one of the volunteers reaching communities in hard to reach areas
WHO strives to ensure that the entire population in Iraq remains safe from COVID-19 by empowering them with information on how to stay protected. Ten-year-old Ahmed Ali is one such child that WHO wants to see remain safe during the entire COVID-19 pandemic. At only ten years, Ahmed is the breadwinner for his family. His father is disabled and unable to fend for the family, a gap that Ali. He does this by working in a bakery to earn income, which he brings home to support cover the basic family needs. Part of the income is saved to cover for his sister's education needs. Despite his hard work, Ahmed is scared of this deadly virus. He worries about contracting it and passing it on to his parents when he meets people during his business transactions. WHO's implementing partner, UMIS, ensured that Ahmed and his family received face masks and hand sanitizers to help them stayed protected from COVID-19 in addition to furnishing them with information on how to stay safe.

Al-Zaafaraniya city



Hanan Amina receives face masks for her family and self after engaging with volunteers conducting community education on COVID-19 in Al-Zaafaraniya city Hanan

Amina is a 32 years old widow, a milk and cheese seller. Her business is located in front of a bakery facing a busy street in Baghdad. In her line of work, she interacts with several people on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, she confesses, “I have limited knowledge about COVID-19 because this information has not reached us. I have heard in the passing that people are dying of some disease, but that’s the much that I know,” said Hanan, despite the disease being in circulation in the country for several months. At the time, the sensitization teams visited her, she had no mask on and did not have neither a hand sanitizer either or anything to protect herself from the COVID-19. The teams engaged with Hanan to listen to her concerns on why she was not protecting herself and learned that Hanan had limited knowledge of the pandemic; she was more concerned about how to fend for her family, as she did not have enough resources to buy facemasks for the entire household to stay protected. Thanks to WHO and its partner's efforts, not only did Hanan get information on how to stay protected and safe during the pandemic, but she also received facemasks, gloves, and hand sanitizers to help her remain protected.

Wasit city



Sabah Tuma received information and education materials on COVID-19 from community volunteers sensitizing communities in Wasit city in Iraq. 38-year-old Sabah Tuma lost three of his neighbors due to COVID-19. Fifteen other people in his neighborhood tested positive for COVID-19, and yet this did not hamper his efforts of providing food stamps to those in her community. Previously a second-hand shop attendant, Sabah, took over his mom’s business of food stamps because she wanted to keep her home and away from the pandemic. His daily worry was, however, people who visited his business entity without wearing masks or using hand sanitizers. The fear drove them to put up signage urging people to wear facemasks, gloves, sanitize, and maintain social distancing when coming for their food. Because people in my neighborhood followed what we shared with them, the number of cases started declining in their area. “I am grateful that the volunteers supported by the Ministry of Health, WHO, and UMIS are moving from community to community to sensitize us about the dangers of this disease and how we can protect ourselves to avoid contracting the virus,” said Tuma. “We will continue observing all the measures shared with us, in addition to sanitizing our door handles and surrounding,” added Tuma. Such commitments from the local communities give hope that COVID-19 will be managed if all people follow the guidelines provided by health authorities.

Al-Dora city



Al-Basra governorate



Khudir received a face mask from the sensitization team educating people of COVID-19 in Basra city. Although in some locations communities are reluctant to observe COVID-19 guidelines, others are serious about following them. 55-year-old Khudir's sales decreased tremendously after people started avoiding him for not wearing facemasks when selling his toys, a source of his income. Khudir says that he is ignorant about COVID-19 prevention procedures. "I am keen to learn more about how my family and I can stay safe from COVID-19 as I make some money for my family," said Khudir *Mohammed. "Not wearing a face mask and having no sanitizer has cost me a lot of customers, after receiving information on the disease from teams moving in our communities, and with the support that they provided to us inform of face masks, I plan to protect my business. I will wear my mask to keep safe and sanitize my hands and the toys that I am selling. I appeal to other business people to wear masks, and always sanitize their hands because it's a safe way to try and avoid contracting COVID-19," said Khudir.

WHO continues reaching out to communities in the most affected areas of the country to ensure that information on COVID-19 is disseminated as widely as possible using all communications and media tools. Thanks to our donors Government of Kuwait, the European Union, Government of the United Kingdom and Government of France for enable us reach affected people in remote community settings.

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