



WHO high-level mission from the Regional Office visits Iraq and meets with United Nations team in Iraq to discuss preparations for COVID-19 containment measures  
Baghdad, Iraq, 15 March 2020 – A high-level technical mission from the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded a visit to Iraq to support the Iraqi Ministry of Health response to COVID-19 prevention and containment measures.

The mission, which comprised experts from the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region and headquarters in Geneva, held a series of meetings with national health authorities to identify the disease detection dynamics and at-risk populations, in addition to providing guidance on strengthening response and control measures.

The mission also reviewed the Ministry's overall readiness to deal with a potential increase in case reporting and the priority of establishing an Emergency Operation Centre to speed up action now that the disease has been announced as a global pandemic.

WHO experts visited the Central Public Health Laboratory to assess the national laboratory capacity and availability of test kits. They also visited the Communicable Disease Control Centre and designated health facilities in Baghdad to review the ongoing response by nationals and assess the technical support required in the coming period.

Iraq reported its first case of COVID 19 – an Iranian student in Iraq on 22 February 2020 – followed by 4 cases for members of one family with a travel history to Islamic Republic of Iran. Case reporting escalated to include almost all Iraqi governorates. The total number of cases reported as of 12 March stands at 83 confirmed cases, 24 recovered, and 8 deaths.

There is growing concern among the local health authorities about the possibility of domestic transmission of the disease which would challenge the already vulnerable health system in the country, stretched by years of wars and internal crises. The health authorities have already

banned major public events, suspended schools, and closed malls and gathering places until 21 March.

WHO has so far provided and will further provide the Ministry of Health at both central and regional levels with sufficient supplies of laboratory test kits and personal protective equipment to allow for a quick response to severe cases. In addition, WHO is working around the clock to establish 3 negative-pressure rooms in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra to accommodate patients who might require more sophisticated medical treatment.

For more information, please contact:

Ms Ajyal Sultany  
WHO Communications Officer  
+964 7740 892 878  
sultanya@who.int

Ms Baraa Shaba  
WHO Communications Officer  
+96478000100244  
shabab@who.int

Ms Pauline Ajello  
WHO Communications Officer  
+964 7729 877 288  
ajellopa@who.int

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