Tehran, 13 September 2020 – The World Health Organization (WHO), through a donation by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Germany, has provided the Islamic Republic of Iran with more than 67,500 enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) tests. The tests, which measure the amount of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) in individuals, will be used for research and surveillance in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“These kits will be used for seroepidemiologic studies in populations in different provinces to help us gain better insight into the prevalence of the disease in populations under study,” said Dr Ali Akbar Haghdoost, Deputy Minister for Education at Iran’s Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the head of the Epidemiology Committee.

A new working group has been established within the Epidemiology Committee of the National COVID-19 Headquarters, endorsed by the Minister of Health and Medical Education, to coordinate seroepidemiologic studies in the country.

Some of the tests were distributed based on the seroepidemiology working group’s recommendation to the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization to ensure the quality of donated plasma. Tests were also provided to the Pasteur Institute of Iran for research on the immunity of key populations and assessing the quality of domestic diagnostic kits; and to Pediatric Infections Research Centre at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran for a study on the prevalence of the epidemic among children. Additional tests will be distributed by the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization according to the recommendations of the committee.
WHO EMRO | WHO makes SARS-CoV-2 antibody ELISA tests available in Islamic Republic of Iran with support from Robert Koch Institute

“Seroepidemiologic studies on SARS-CoV-2 are becoming increasingly important for further steering effective public health measures, for better understanding of immunological reactions, for vaccine development and new treatment options. WHO will continue to provide strong support to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in these areas, together with other partners such as the Robert Koch Institute,” said Dr Christoph Hamelmann, WHO Representative in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“Although this is the first time WHO has supported the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization in the COVID-19 response, this organization has contributed to controlling HIV, hepatitis C and other bloodborne infections in the recent decade through procedures conducted on donated blood products and counselling provided to donors as a strategy for ensuring blood safety,” said Dr Omid Zamani, WHO National Professional Officer for Communicable Diseases.

Usually, antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 develop during the course of COVID-19 in infected patients. In the absence of a vaccine, they indicate current or past infection, irrespective of whether the individual had a severe or mild disease, or was asymptomatic. It is not yet clear for how long after the infection the acquired antibodies will remain detectable in the blood, and to what degree they contribute to immunity.

The Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization’s High Institute for Research and Education in Transfusion Medicine has been a designated WHO collaborating centre since 1 September 2013. The organization is screening blood donors nationwide and prepares plasma therapy kits for treating COVID-19 patients in hospitals.
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