

Tripoli, Libya, 26 August 2020 – Over the past 2 weeks, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Libya has more than doubled. Given the acute shortages of tests and laboratory capacity, the real number of cases is likely to be much higher.

Community transmission has been reported in some of the country's main cities, including Tripoli and Sebha. Compounding the situation, Libya's health care system has been badly disrupted by years of conflict. Approximately 50% of primary health care facilities are closed. In those that remain open, health care staff are working long hours to care for COVID-19 and other patients, including providing children with immunization services, which have been adversely affected by the ongoing conflict and aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first half of August 2020, at least 8 health care staff in the south of the country tested positive for COVID-19.

“We are alarmed at the rapid spread of the virus in the country,” said Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative in Libya. “While the number of new cases has increased dramatically, contact tracing remains difficult. The stigma associated with COVID-19 is so great that infected people are reluctant to come forward for health care and unwilling to disclose the names of others with whom they have been in close contact. We are in a vicious cycle. The virus is spreading because infected people and their contacts are lost, preventing follow up. The ever greater numbers of infected patients are placing a huge strain on the health system, which is already unable to cope with normal workloads.”

WHO is supporting the efforts of Libyan authorities to increase the number of COVID-19 tests. Testing is essential to detect the virus and treat those infected. It can also help protect vulnerable close contacts, such as elderly family members or those with pre-existing conditions, and prevent them getting infected.

The WHO country office in Libya is working closely with UNICEF to destigmatize COVID-19 and explain that the virus can affect anyone, anywhere. WHO and UNICEF are developing messages to describe the simple, effective measures that people can take to protect themselves against the disease.

“Understandably, there is always a lot of uncertainty around new viruses”, said Ms Hoff. “However, COVID-19 is a manageable disease, not a death sentence. The world is going to

have to learn to live with this virus for some time. WHO is providing close technical guidance and advice to the Libyan authorities in their efforts to test, track and treat COVID-19 and halt its further spread.”

WHO has requested US\$ 22.3 million to respond to COVID-19 in Libya. Thus far, it has received just over US\$ 2.3 million in signed contributions. WHO thanks all the donors who have contributed thus far.

Saturday 20th of April 2024 04:06:44 PM