



21 March 2020, Cairo, Egypt – As COVID-19 continues to take toll on people’s lives in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, vaccines delivered through the COVAX Facility have arrived in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory, Tunisia, Somalia, and Sudan with a total of more than 1.9 million doses delivered. The coming days will mark the arrival of more batches to other countries as well.

“After a year since declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic, we are pleased that vaccines are now a real and present tool in our fight against COVID-19, supporting our historic efforts towards ending this pandemic,” said Ahmed Dr Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

To date, 19 countries in the Region have commenced vaccination against COVID-19, administering over 16 million doses and targeting high-risk groups aiming to cover 20% of their population. Of these 19 countries, in Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan the delivery of vaccines via COVAX is the only source of COVID-19 vaccines. More than 15 countries vaccinating their populations have already procured vaccines through bilateral agreements with vaccine manufacturers.

“As an effective tool in the fight against this pandemic, we call on countries to unite under the banner of vaccine equity. However, everyone should know that vaccines alone can’t end the pandemic,” said Dr Al- Mandhari. “Countries need to continue imposing and adhering to the proven public health measures such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, ensure sufficient ventilation,” he stressed.

Vaccination roll out in the Region is facing several challenges, including public hesitancy

against vaccines, major inequalities as vaccines are rolled out, critical shortages in supply amid high level of demand and logistics issues related to cold chain storage of some vaccines, especially when more tranches of vaccines arrive. WHO's Regional office for the Eastern Mediterranean urges countries to boost awareness about vaccines uptake, tackle misinformation, and ensure that vulnerable groups aren't left behind when developing national deployment vaccination plans.

"To overcome this virus, we need to urgently promote facts and science and reduce panic and fear. The more people who are vaccinated, the more effective the vaccines will become in slowing the spread of the virus, driving down infection rates and protecting the whole of society," stressed Dr Al-Mandhari.

About COVAX Facility

The COVAX Facility is a global coalition that works to ensure fair and equitable access of COVID-19 vaccines around the world. So far, 190 countries have joined the COVAX initiative, including all 22 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The COVAX Facility aims to have 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines available for distribution across the globe by the end of 2021, targeting those most at risk (e.g. frontline health workers) and most vulnerable severe diseases and death (e.g. elderly and people with co-morbidities).

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