2 April 2020 – In just one week, the number of COVID-19 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region has almost doubled, from 32,442 cases on 26 March to 58,168 on 2 April. New cases have been reported in some of the most vulnerable countries with fragile health systems. Even in countries with stronger health systems, we have seen a worrying spike in the numbers of cases and deaths reported.

I cannot stress enough the urgency of the situation. We have a window of opportunity to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our Region, and we need to act quickly. Government leadership is vital. A whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach are absolutely necessary for an effective response.

The increasing numbers of cases show that transmission is rapidly occurring at local and community levels. There are two ways in which this transmission can be controlled.

First, countries need to be more aggressive in testing all suspected cases, tracing all contacts, and ensuring proper isolation measures. Isolation of confirmed cases is critical and requires scaling up in many countries. These actions are critical to controlling and reducing transmission of the disease and changing the course of this pandemic.

Suspected and confirmed cases must be removed from the community and placed in hospitals, temporary facilities or other appropriate settings with proper infection prevention and control measures. Where needed, temporary isolation centres must be established.

There must be greater focus on identifying and isolating even mild cases that can silently advance the pandemic. Health workers must be properly protected as they can be most at risk of contracting the disease.

Second, people need to maintain stricter physical distancing practices and more stringent hygiene behaviours. It should be clear by now to everyone how important these measures are to protect themselves and their loved ones.
Stay home, stay safe is not just a slogan, it is a life-saving reminder. Anyone showing suspected symptoms of fever and cough must self-isolate, avoid all contact with others, and quickly seek medical care if they have trouble breathing.

I know that several contexts in our Region, such as camp settings, represent high-risk environments for transmission of the virus and can make physical distancing a challenge. We are working hard to ensure that people who are most vulnerable are protected, and able to get tested and treated without delay or interruption.

We still have a window of opportunity, but this window is slowly closing day by day. Our regional vision is based on safeguarding the health of all people by all people, so countries, communities, and individuals have an equally important role to play. COVID-19 can only be controlled using aggressive, appropriate measures, and an inclusive approach that is built around solidarity and action, protecting every individual’s rights to life and health. We cannot allow this virus to take hold of our Region.

Related links

Access latest information and global updates on the pandemic

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