



3 March 2020, Cairo, Egypt - 1682 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed in 14 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region as of 2 March, 6pm Cairo local time. These include 66 deaths reported in Islamic Republic of Iran.

While the numbers inside China have been rapidly declining, the sudden increase in cases in countries outside China, including in our Region, is deeply alarming. We remain concerned about the surge of cases and deaths in the Region and the increase in the number of travel-related confirmed cases.

We have also seen cases of local transmission in our Region, and it is likely that the outbreak may continue to progress from case importation to local transmission.

We have the required expertise, capacities and tools to contain this outbreak. But the window of opportunity is closing, and we need to move fast.

We continue to support all countries in enhancing surveillance for disease detection and reporting systems, including at points of entry; scaling-up laboratory capacities; training rapid response teams; improving infection prevention and control; ensuring hospitals are prepared; raising community awareness; and providing essential supplies.

We are also working with all countries to conduct rapid risk assessments to identify key gaps and minimize the risk of importation into countries, particularly in countries with weaker health systems. Areas with high-risk factors, such as camps and cities hosting mass gatherings, are of key concern.

Overall, this outbreak has revealed weaknesses in our health systems, and highlights the need not only to act now, but to invest in preparedness capacities over the long term.

We still have an opportunity to contain this virus, but our success requires collective efforts and greater investment at the global, regional and national levels. Countries in the Region need to work together, share detailed and timely information, and show solidarity to those affected by the outbreak, in accordance with Article 44 of the International Health Regulations.

Ultimately, these combined and concerted efforts will not only help us contain this outbreak, but also protect our populations from other communicable public health risks, while strengthening health systems, bringing us closer to our goals of ensuring the health and well-being of all people, everywhere.

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Saturday 17th of May 2025 03:53:57 PM