

10 September 2020 – This week, our Region reached another grim milestone as we surpassed 2 million cases of COVID-19.

We are observing developments that remind us again that we must remain extremely vigilant in managing this virus. Several countries that had successfully controlled transmission a few months ago, including Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon, are now seeing an acceleration of cases.

Other countries seeing increasing trends include Libya, the occupied Palestinian territory, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

As social gatherings and population mobility increase, international travel resumes, and levels of mask use remain low, it is perhaps inevitable that we are seeing a degree of resurgence of cases across the Region. The challenge for us all is to ease these measures in a manner and at a pace that minimizes the public health threat.

It is now more critical than ever to protect those who have not yet been infected, especially the most vulnerable. By aggressively finding and isolating every case, and tracing and quarantining every contact, we not only reduce transmission, but we also reduce pressure on hospitals so that critical COVID-19 patients and other patients can receive the urgent care they need.

In some countries, including Iraq and Morocco, hospitals are already overwhelmed, and intensive care units are filled to capacity, potentially resulting in serious consequences for others who require lifesaving medical services.

Looking ahead, several new risk factors also challenge our ability to substantially alter the course of the pandemic in our Region.

Many countries have already started to open schools or are in the process of doing so this month. Understandably, students, parents, teachers, and other school personnel are concerned

about potential risk of infection spreading among students. Infection among school children can also lead to infections among vulnerable people, including the elderly and people with co-morbidities.

In many countries of the Region, the influenza season is also about to start, which may result in new peaks and upsurges of suspected cases.

To reduce risk of transmission in the coming weeks and months, individuals and communities must continue to implement the well-known and proven prevention measures, especially in settings such as social gatherings, schools and other public events. Wearing masks consistently when it is not possible to physically distance is one of the most effective means to protect ourselves and our families.

Countries must scale up existing public health measures, with a focus on testing, isolation and treatment of patients, protection of health workers, and contact tracing. In addition, we should implement “smart,” targeted lockdowns to prevent social gatherings in hotspot areas that are seeing significant increases in transmission.

In the coming weeks, we will be working with countries of the Region to provide guidance on national intra-action reviews for COVID-19. This process will allow countries to conduct periodic reviews of their national and subnational COVID-19 response and identify practical areas for immediate action and sustained improvement.

Much has been done in our Region over the past months to contain this outbreak, but there is still much more to be done. We must not allow COVID-19 fatigue to set in.

Saturday 17th of May 2025 03:12:37 PM