



26 March 2020 — A team of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded a COVID-19 technical support mission to Egypt on 25 March 2020. The objectives of the mission were to understand the current situation; review ongoing response activities; provide on-site technical support as needed; and identify strengths and gaps to guide response priorities.

“After several days of intensive meetings and field visits both inside and outside Cairo, we see that Egypt is making substantial efforts to control COVID-19 outbreak. Significant work is being done, especially in the areas of early detection, laboratory testing, isolation, contact tracing and referral of patients,” says Dr Yvan Hutin, Director for Communicable Diseases in WHO’s Regional Office and mission team lead.

“But more needs to be done. There is now a critical window of opportunity to effectively control the outbreak before the current local transmission progresses to community transmission. We have agreed on several areas that can be scaled up, taking a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.”

Considerable efforts have been made by the government in allocating additional dedicated human and financial resources needed to contain the outbreak. Progress has been made in expanding the number of peripheral laboratories that are now able to test for COVID-19, and consideration will be made in engaging overall laboratory capacities. Across the country, 17 laboratories now have the capacity to test cases. An additional four will be added soon and university laboratories will also be engaged. With support from WHO and other partners, Egypt now has the capacity to conduct up to 200,000 tests.

Egypt's strong disease surveillance system and contact tracing efforts have proven effective in controlling managing sporadic and clusters of cases before they can spread. Recent border closures now provide an opportunity to enhance screening and rapid testing capacity using a risk assessment approach.

Maintaining effective contact tracing with proper quarantine mechanisms, as well as continuing systematic testing of patients seeking treatment for all acute respiratory infections will ensure that no critical COVID-19 cases are missed.

Building on the current well-structured Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) programme, WHO will work with national health authorities to enhance the isolation, quarantine and referral mechanisms, and scale up IPC practices to prevent transmission at all levels to ensure that patients and health workers are protected.

Significant efforts have been made to ensure the public is updated on the current situation, including working with other sectors to reach vulnerable populations. Greater coordination and partnerships with civil society, NGOs, and the media will ensure that the public is able to make informed decisions, without succumbing to mistrust and the stigma associated with the disease.

"Health officials and health workers are clearly working very hard and are committed to controlling this outbreak and saving lives. The fight against coronavirus in Egypt is ongoing, and we need everybody in the country to be engaged in this response. The right and timely public health measures implemented with the right scale can make a difference," adds Dr Hutin.

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