

The WHO Health Emergencies programme works with countries and partners to help build the capacities required to rapidly detect, respond to and recover from any emergency health threat. The programme aims to minimize the health consequences of outbreaks and emergencies by:

- helping countries to strengthen capacities to detect, prevent and respond to health emergencies;
- mitigating the risk of high threat diseases and infectious hazards;
- detecting and assessing emergency health threats and informing public health decision-making;
- responding rapidly and effectively to emergencies under a coordinated incident management system; and
- ensuring WHO's work in emergencies is effectively managed, sustainably financed, adequately staffed and operationally ready to fulfil its mission.

Pakistan is prone to natural disasters. Droughts in 2018 and 2019 in Sindh and Balochistan affected 7 million people. The flash floods of 2019 in Balochistan affected 40 000 people and damaged 15 health facilities. Pakistan is in one of the most seismically active regions in the world and experiences frequent earthquakes. The last earthquake was in September 2019, in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir. It claimed 40 lives, injured nearly 900 people and damaged health facilities and other infrastructure. In January 2020, an avalanche in the northern part of Pakistan claimed 77 lives, injured over 94 and destroyed many houses and properties.





Minister of Health Dr. Azfar Ali Khan supplies and equipment to the Special Advisor to the WHO's response to COVID-19

WHO's response to the COVID-19 outbreak since March 2020 has included:

- establishing multisectoral, multi-partner coordination mechanisms to support COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts;
- supporting case management through training health workers and procuring and donating medical supplies and equipment;
- implementing a risk communication and community engagement strategy and engaging religious leaders and academic associations;
- supporting COVID-19 surveillance (monitoring of transmission and contact tracing) and case investigation, collecting, analysing, disseminating and utilizing epidemiological data to guide public health interventions;
- establishing and training rapid response teams;
- strengthening points of entry surveillance through training, establishing information booths, procuring and donating supplies and other equipment, including thermo guns;
- strengthening laboratory capacity through training, procuring and distributing laboratory supplies and equipment; daily testing capacity has increased from 200 to over 50 000 in 4 months;
- ensuring the safety of health care workers by implementing infection, prevention and control strategies, training them in IPC measures and donating personal protective equipment;

- supporting the development of various plans and guidelines for COVID-19, including the national action plan, national laboratory testing strategy and guidelines, a preparedness and response plan, a socioeconomic plan for COVID-19;
- implementing the essential health services plan for continuing the provision of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, including maternal and child health services, immunization and communicable disease control;
- contributing towards research and development by conducting a case-control study (to understand the risk factors and co-morbidities of COVID-19 mortality in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa); and a nationwide seroprevalence survey (to ascertain the prevalence of COVID-19 in the population);
- providing regular briefings to over 50 donors, partners and ambassadors of over 25 countries on Pakistan's health needs.

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