The coronavirus disease COVID-19 continues to spread at the regional and global levels. As of 17 October 2020, the global cumulative incidence reached 39 023 292 reported cases and 1 099 586 associated deaths with a case fatality ratio (CFR) of 2.8%. Meanwhile, the 22 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) have reported a total of 2 749 606 cases, which represent about 7.1% of the global count, with 69 821 associated deaths (CFR 2.5%). Most countries in the Region are in the community transmission phase.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, the country that has reported the highest number of total cases in the Region is Islamic Republic of Iran (526 490 cases; 19.1% of the Region's total), followed by Iraq (423 524; 15.4%) and Saudi Arabia (341 854; 12.4%). Islamic Republic of Iran also reported the highest number of total associated deaths (30 123; CFR 5.7%) followed by Iraq (10 198; CFR 2.4%) and Pakistan (6638; CFR 2.1%). The highest CFRs were reported by Yemen (29%) followed by Sudan (6.1%), while the lowest CFRs were reported by Qatar (0.2%) followed by Bahrain and United Arab Emirates (0.4% each).

During epidemiological week 42, the Region reported a 2.7% increase in cases when compared to the previous week (141 790 cases compared to 138 008 cases). Similarly, a 10% increase was observed for associated deaths (3462 deaths compared to 3144 deaths). The weekly trend per capita showed a slight increase as compared to the previous week (376/100 000 compared to 356/100 000).

Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco reported a relative increase in COVID-19 activity. The cumulative number of cases in Jordan increased from 23 998 to 36 053 (50% increase compared to the previous weeks), Tunisia from 32 556 to 40 542 (25% increase), Lebanon from 52 558 to 61 284 (17% increase) and Morocco from 149 841 to 170 911 (14% increase). Jordan had the largest relative increase in deaths (82%) followed by Lebanon (12%) and Libya (11%).

In terms of testing, a total of 41 552 337 laboratory PCR tests were conducted since the start of the outbreak across the Region including 2 292 712 tests in week 42, which shows a 1% increase compared to the previous week (2 280 221). The highest number of PCR tests were reported from United Arab Emirates (11.5 million), followed by Saudi Arabia (7.3 million) and Islamic Republic of Iran (4.4 million). The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are performing the highest rate of testing per capita (117 062/100 000 and 94 483/100 000, respectively). The average positivity rate for the Region is 6.6%. WHO recommends a positivity rate of around 3–12% as a general benchmark indicating adequate testing, which was achieved in most countries of the Region.

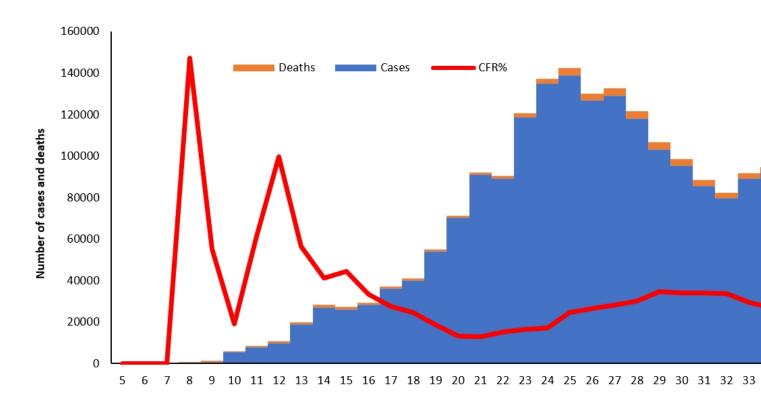
Supporting countries in the Region

The regional incident management support team continues to coordinate the response and provide technical support to countries and partners in the Region in the areas of coordination and partnership, surveillance, laboratory capacity, clinical management, infection prevention and control, risk communication and community engagement, points of entry according to the International Health Regulations (2005), research, health systems, and essential health services among others. Activities this week included:

contributing to the 67th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean which was held on 12-13 October 2020 with the participation of ministers of health and the high-level representatives of the Region's 22 countries and territories, partner organizations and civil society. This online meeting represented a significant and necessary chance for all stakeholders to step back and review their approaches in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and to consider how to implement our regional strategy during the pandemic and beyond;

holding the 13th COVID-19 Laboratory Community of practice session which addressed biosafety considerations for the testing of SARS-CoV-2 infections with a special focus on the implementation of antigen-based rapid diagnostic tests;

sending a multidisciplinary support mission to Pakistan to evaluate and provide support for the country's COVID-19 response.



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