



2 April 2020 – The World Health Organization (WHO) is working closely with the Syrian Ministry of Health to enhance Syria’s preparedness and response to COVID-19. WHO’s support focuses on 4 main priorities:

- enhancing surveillance and expanding laboratory testing for early detection of cases;
- protecting health care workers by providing them with protective equipment;
- ensuring proper case management, isolation and contact tracing; and
- raising awareness and conducting risk communication.

“WHO classifies Syria as among the high-risk countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, as a result of challenges in the health system resulting from over 9 years of conflict in the country,” said Dr Nima Abid, acting WHO representative in Syria. “WHO continues to aggressively support the health sector in Syria to ensure its preparedness and response to combating COVID-19 in the country.”

WHO has enhanced its surveillance plan by providing the Ministry of Health with infrared thermometers and by installing a thermo-graphic scanner at Damascus International Airport.

In addition, WHO is continuously expanding testing capacity by providing the Central Public Health Laboratory with supplies and testing kits, as well as supportive kits for assertive diagnosis. In addition to expanding the capacity of the central laboratory, a second laboratory is also being scaled up as a reference laboratory for epidemic diseases, and WHO is providing guidelines for laboratory protocols on diagnosis, as well as transmission of samples. WHO has also provided the Ministry of Health with a digital radiography machine to confirm or classify the disease.

To protect health care workers; two batches of personal protective equipment have been delivered, including medical masks, protective masks, one-time-use gowns, multi-use medical clothing, protective glasses, hand-sterilization packages, as well as personal protection for

surveillance and response teams. WHO continues to support rapid response teams by training them on how to gather samples from suspected cases, as well as providing them with technical and guidance documents about laboratory testing and handling suspected cases.

WHO is providing health workers affiliated with the Ministry of Health with the proper advocacy support and health information about COVID-19, as well as guidelines on proper conduct during the different phases of the disease. WHO has also helped in the development of the Passenger Locator Card to be distributed at different border check-points. In efforts to rehabilitate more isolation and quarantine centres, WHO has supplied the Ministry with respiratory machines and intensive care beds.

WHO is strongly committed to raising public awareness and enabling risk communication, and has provided airports and aviation staff with guidelines regarding disinfecting procedures, placed stands with educational pamphlets and brochures about COVID-19 at border crossings, and prepared a support package about the disease, and an investigation form for suspected and confirmed cases. Currently, WHO is working on increasing awareness by engaging with information providers and disseminating facts about COVID-19, as well as the proper preventive measures. WHO has conducted 5 risk communication workshops in different governorates around Syria.

To date Syria has reported 10 cases of COVID-19, including 2 deaths.

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