



16 August 2023 – A WHO delegation conducted a two-day site visit to Al-Azhar University and affiliated hospitals in Egypt as part of the Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Study. The visit aimed to gather firsthand insights from the university's research team and provide feedback. The WHO delegation engaged with various stakeholders including university officials, hospital CEOs, and research teams, aiming to strengthen collaborative efforts for evidence-based policy-making.

A delegation representing the WHO's Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Technical Team conducted a two-day site visit to Al-Azhar University on 16-17 August 2023.

This study from Egypt stands as one of four national studies contributing to the Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness Research Initiative. This collective effort that has been organized and supported by the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO), was launched in September 2021 and is projected to conclude by September 2023. Iran, Jordan, and Pakistan are other countries participating in this Regional Study. The primary objectives of this multinational study include capacity building in the Region for conducting similar studies, while ensuring data reliability and quality through using standardized WHO approved protocols.

The WHO's site visit had the primary purpose of enabling its technical team to gain firsthand insights from the university's research team, while also affording an opportunity for the WHO to provide feedback and recommendations. The WHO delegation comprised of experts from the Divisions of Science, Information and Dissemination (SID), and Communicable Diseases (DCD) at EMRO, as well as the Country Office (CO) in Egypt.

On the first day of the visit, 16 August 2023, the WHO met Dr. Salama Dawoud, the President of Al-Azhar University, and the Vice-President of Postgraduate Studies and Research. The university leadership underscored their strong commitment to collaborative research with the WHO, aimed at generating and use of evidence to inform policy-making on both national and regional levels. In parallel, the WHO EMRO highlighted the importance of strengthening the capacity of Member States to conduct similar studies, given their complexity in design and implementation, limited access to pertinent COVID-19 vaccine data in the region, and the use of locally manufactured and approved vaccine products unique to certain Eastern Mediterranean countries. The WHO Country Office for Egypt also emphasized its support for research and development (R&D) in Egypt, especially implementation research contributing towards evidence-informed decision making.

Subsequently, the Deans of the Faculties of Medicine, the Principal Investigator, and the research teams of the five affiliated university hospitals presented their study progress and findings. The initial day's discussions culminated in a visit to the Virology Unit in the Medical Microbiology and Immunology Department at Al-Azhar Faculty of Medicine for Girls, where the molecular testing is carried out and part of the samples are preserved. In addition, the WHO conducted a swift document review of participant records and consent forms.

The second day of the visit, 17 August 2023, focused on visits to two university hospitals partaking in Egypt's COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness study: Al-Zahraa Hospital and Al-Hussein Hospital in Cairo. These visits encompassed various interactions including meetings with hospital CEOs, updates from research managers, meeting with the Infection prevention and control teams, as well as the laboratory teams, and finally tours of the hospital laboratories. These laboratories are instrumental in conducting serology testing and preserving samples for the relevant study tests. Additionally, there was an update on the progress of data entry provided by the data management focal point at the National Research Center, which is a partner in the study.

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