7 April 2021, Cairo, Egypt – With the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines to Libya on 5 April 2020, all 22 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region have now received vaccines to help in the fight against the pandemic. As early as December 2020, some countries began procuring vaccines directly from the manufacturers and launched vaccination campaigns at the start of the year. Additionally, 13 countries received vaccines via the COVAX Facility, with the first shipment landing in Sudan on 3 March 2021 and the latest shipments arriving in Islamic Republic of Iran on 5 April.

“The rapid distribution and rollout of COVID-19 vaccines across the Region shows the commitment and efforts by countries, WHO and COVAX partners to use this unique tool available to protect populations,” said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “While COVAX shipments may not have been the first to arrive in countries, they have been instrumental for those that could not have started vaccinations otherwise, and the Region is now successfully on its way to meeting the goals set by WHO’s Director General to ensure that vaccination of priority groups in all countries has started by World Health Day on 7 April.”

To date, more than 25 million doses of COVID-19 have been administered so far across the Region, with countries like the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Morocco administering more than 20 doses per 100 population (47% for Bahrain, 22% for Morocco, 32% for Qatar, 87% for United Arab Emirates).

“Despite the impress progress, however, we still see unfair distribution. Some countries have enough vaccines to protect their populations many times over, while others face significant shortages. COVID-19 cannot be defeated one country at a time. I urge all manufacturers and countries to join forces to ensure sufficient doses of vaccines. Our work needs to be guided by the need to protect people, save lives and end the pandemic. Political games and selfishness will not help, because no one is safe, until everyone is safe,” said Dr Al-Mandhari.

As of 5 April 2021, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has reported more than 7.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and almost 162 000 deaths (case-fatality rate 2.1%) since the beginning of the pandemic. The number of new cases and deaths increased by 9% and 7% in the week of 28 March 2021 respectively compared to the previous week.

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