Key Messages: UPDATED

- People confirmed to have COVID-19: 22 (12 new)
- People who are presumptive for COVID-19: 51
- People who have tested negative for COVID-19: 171
- Key concern: Border crossing areas in the country’s west

(Source: Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan)

Situation Overview: UPDATED

Globally, 169,387 people have been confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 and 6,513 fatalities have been reported across 148 countries. The overall number of confirmed cases and fatalities outside China is now higher than in China. On 11 March, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. WHO reminds all countries and communities that the spread of this virus can be significantly slowed or even reversed through the implementation of robust containment and control activities. The increasing spread of the virus from and within Italy, Iran, Spain, France, Germany and South Korea remains a concern. Travel restrictions by countries are changing rapidly and should be monitored on daily basis.

The first person to test positive for COVID-19 in Afghanistan was confirmed on 24 February by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). A total of 22 people are now confirmed to have the virus in Hirat (13), Badghis (1), Balkh (1), Daykundi (1), Loghar (2), Kapisa (1) and Samangan (3) provinces. Contact tracing for the people confirmed with COVID-19 is ongoing. The clinical condition of the people both confirmed and presumptive for the virus is considered good. One patient in Hirat has reportedly recovered and been discharged from the treatment facility. The people presumptive for COVID-19 are being kept in isolation wards while those confirmed for the virus are being treated in provincial hospitals. On 14 March, the Government of Afghanistan announced that all schools would be closed for an initial period of 4 weeks. It is reported that all public gatherings in Hirat have been banned until further notice and further advice is being given against public celebration of the Nawruz holiday in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Response UPDATED

The focus of activities in Afghanistan remains on both preparedness and containment. MoPH is working closely with UN and other partners to rapidly expand in-country preparedness and containment capacity. The aim is to strengthen detection and surveillance capacity at points-of-entry into Afghanistan including airports and border-crossing sites (especially in the west), and to continue the training of medical staff on case-management, risk communication and community engagement. The level of support and activities in all key areas will need to be expanded rapidly to manage the further spread of the disease.

MoPH has established five committees for the surveillance of COVID-19 at the national and provincial level: Points of Entry Committee; Population Surveillance Committee; Data Management Committee; National COVID-19 Contact Tracing Committee; and the Lab Surveillance Committee. It is expected that some 26,000 diagnostic tests from the UAE and China will arrive in country in the coming weeks.

Currently, a national isolation centre with a capacity of 100 beds, as well as regional and provincial isolation centers with total capacity of 991 beds, are in place. Four major airports with international flights and all ground crossings are staffed and equipped for screening of travellers with a focus on those arriving from global COVID-19 hotspots. The Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) is currently undertaking diagnostic tests for COVID-19 with a maximum of 50 test a day.

Health partners have trained some 360 healthcare workers on case management and infection prevention and control. Partners have further installed temporary washing stations for returnees at screening facilities and are completing the construction of permanent WASH facilities – 19 facilities at the Islam Qala border crossing. Some 55 handwashing stations have been installed in all transit facilities in border areas in efforts to limit transmission. Community awareness activities in internal displacement sites in Hirat and COVID-19 trainings for 15 Mobile Health Teams in Ghor and Badghis provinces have also been provided. Awareness raising and evidence-based sensitisation on COVID-19 facts remains a key concern and requires further strengthening.
Cross Border Concerns: **UPDATED**

As of 16 March, there are 53 people confirmed to have COVID-19 in Pakistan. In Iran, health officials have reported that 13,938 people have COVID-19 – up from 11,324 people as per 14 March reports – and 724 people have died after contracting the virus.

IOM reports that the flow of spontaneous returnees from Iran has surged considerably since 8 March primarily due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19 in Iran. During the week starting 8 March, IOM reported that between 5,000 and 8,000 returnees came into Afghanistan each day through the Islam Qala border crossing alone. Between 14 and 15 March, more than 20,000 returnees arrived into Afghanistan from Iran through this crossing – the largest two-day return ever recorded. Based on data collected from people who crossed the Afghanistan-Iran border in past years, IOM has identified 25 districts at-risk of the spread of COVID-19 as a result of high people movements. The four main provincial areas of concern are: Hirat, Nimroz, Kabul and Ghor.

On 13 March, Pakistan announced it was closing its borders for an initial period of 14 days related to protective measures against COVID-19. Specific information related to commercial movements has not been made public. As the main supply routes for many critical relief commodities are via the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, humanitarian partners are concerned about resulting delays and interruptions to ongoing humanitarian response. Coordinated efforts are underway to secure corridors for the transport of humanitarian goods.

On 1 March, Turkmenistan closed its borders with Afghanistan. Whilst the border is closed for civilian movement, it remains open for restricted commercial traffic. Similarly, on 2 March, both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan suspended flights to and from Afghanistan to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The closure of border crossings with Pakistan and Uzbekistan has restricted trade and Afghan imports.

UN organisations are actively supporting response activities with MoPH to address preparedness and emergency coordination actions in the border provinces with Iran and Pakistan (Nangarhar, Kandahar, Nimroz and Hirat). Support includes: secondment of staff for cross border surveillance; material support; publication of MoPH and WHO Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials; billboards; community-level awareness raising and sensitisation efforts through health education sessions and Displacement Tracking Matrix focus group discussions; and use of IOM transit facilities as temporary isolation/quarantine spaces.

**UN Flight Operations UPDATED**

On 17 March 2020, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) informed that it is implementing additional preventive measures to reduce the spread of the virus and to protect the health of passengers and humanitarian staff members. UNHAS requires all passengers to undergo temperature checks (using a non-contact infrared thermometer); and to wash and disinfect their hands before entering the UN terminal or UNHAS check-in counters. UNHAS disinfects aircrafts prior to passengers boarding.

**WHO Key Facts:**

- It is possible for people of any age to be infected with COVID-19.
- People with pre-existing medical conditions, like high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart or lung disease are more at risk of severe disease
- Older adults are more at risk of severe COVID-19 disease
- Risk of severe COVID-19 disease gradually increases with age over the age of 40 years.

**WHO Key Advice for Older Adults and People with Pre-Existing Conditions:**

- When you have visitors to your home, exchange “1 metre greetings”, like a wave, nod, or bow.
- Ask visitors and those you live with to wash their hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces in your home, especially areas that people touch a lot.
- If someone you live with isn’t feeling well (especially with possible COVID-19 symptoms), limit your shared spaces.
- If you become ill with symptoms of COVID-19, contact your healthcare provider by telephone before visiting your healthcare facility.
- Make a plan in preparation for an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community.
- When you go out in public, follow the same preventative guidelines as you would at home.
- Stay up to date using information from reliable sources.
Global/Regional UPDATED

- A WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO) support mission to Afghanistan has arrived in Afghanistan. The mission team will support WHO Afghanistan in enhancing operational readiness and response measures in six major areas: surveillance and rapid response; risk communication and community engagement; infection prevention and control; and mass gathering/points of entry. The mission team will remain in-country for 10-14 days to conduct full assessment and implementation of recommendations, with the possibility for 1-2 people to stay longer (up to 4 weeks) to continue with implementing the recommendations.

National

- WHO together with the Health Cluster has developed and is implementing a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan to complement the MoPH Emergency Response Plan for Coronavirus 2020 and additional funding is currently being sought for this plan. The Inter-Cluster Coordination Team is developing a wider Strategic Response Plan that outlines multi-sector preparedness and response efforts, complementing the health response to COVID-19 outbreak in Afghanistan. This Plan is expected to be finalised later this week. The Plan also aims to highlight the potential effects of the outbreak on ongoing humanitarian response and spell out mitigation measures being employed to reduce interruptions to life-saving services. The HCT will be briefed on the plan on Thursday. Briefings will also be provided by UNHAS and ACBAR.

Sub-national

- WHO and OCHA Western Region (Hirat) are supporting the DoPH and humanitarian partners to scale-up their response to COVID-19. OCHA Afghanistan’s Head of Sub-Office in Hirat visited the Islam Qala border on 11 March together with UNICEF and IOM colleagues, where they met with the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) as well as partners operating at the transit centre. The objective of the visit was to observe the response and preparedness measures being implemented at the transit centre as well to identify areas where further support can be provided. Further work is required to ensure strong coordination at the border.

Funding:

- On 3 March, the World Bank announced an initial package of up to US$12 billion in loans and grants in immediate support to countries coping with the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The World Bank support will prioritise the poorest countries and those at high risk with low capacity.
- On 1 March, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator released US$15 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support global efforts to contain the COVID-19 virus. The funding will help countries with fragile health systems boost their detection and response operations.
- On 26 February, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by the Advisory Board of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF), allocated US$1.5 million for urgently required COVID-19 preparedness and response capacity in-country.
- On 24 February, EU committed €232 million for global efforts to tackle COVID-19 outbreak. Part of these funds will be allocated immediately, while some will be released in the coming months.
- On 25 February, the Government of Afghanistan announced the availability of US$15 million to respond to COVID-19 outbreak and an additional US$10 million in reserve funds for MoPH.

IATA UPDATED

- For the latest available information on travel restrictions, please see table and link below: https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIRECT AIR LINKS WITH AFGHANISTAN</th>
<th>CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES</th>
<th>RELATED DEATHS</th>
<th>CURRENT STATUS (as of 9 March)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>India has barred the entry of all foreign tourists for a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>13,938</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>All passengers are not allowed to enter Kuwait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Details not yet available on IATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tourist visas issued to passengers arriving from Afghanistan are no longer accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Passengers who have transited through or have been in Afghanistan in the past 14 days are not allowed to transit or enter Tajikistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Details not yet available on IATA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**More Information**

**WHO**
- WHO situation dashboard: [https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd)
- General information: [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)
- Introduction to COVID-19 online course: [https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov](https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov)
- WHO Afghanistan Twitter page: [https://twitter.com/WHOAfghanistan](https://twitter.com/WHOAfghanistan)

**United Nations**
- Medical services around the globe for UN staff: [https://hr.un.org/page/medical-services-around-globe](https://hr.un.org/page/medical-services-around-globe)
- Recommendations developed by UN Medical Directors: [https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/Coronavirus_RMP_2020-03-02_FINAL_0.pdf](https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/Coronavirus_RMP_2020-03-02_FINAL_0.pdf)

**Inter-Agency Standing Committee**

**Social Media Campaign**

WHO are seeking your support to help mobilize global action by joining the new campaign to urge people to “Be Ready” for the new #coronavirus, #COVID19 by sharing the latest advice to keep people safe, reassured and informed. This will be an ongoing drive to share helpful, action-driven information to protect your health and all those around you. To start, please:
- Retweet this WHO campaign launch message from your organizational and personal accounts using the following reply, or a variation:
  - All of the @UN is joining in solidarity with @WHO, as they help the world fight #COVID19. Through Being Safe, Smart & Kind we will Be Ready for the new #coronavirus. Learn more about how to prepare at [https://www.who.int/COVID-19](https://www.who.int/COVID-19)
- Share the following social media post and attached social media tile:
  - Speed is of the essence. We must “Be Ready” for the new #coronavirus today. Look out for the most common symptoms for #COVID19: fever, dry cough & shortness of breath. Find out other ways to prepare for the virus by reading the latest @WHO advice: [https://www.who.int/COVID-19](https://www.who.int/COVID-19)

* The next update will be published on 18 March 2020 unless there is a significant change in the situation *

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