**Key Messages: UPDATED**

- People confirmed to have COVID-19: **10,582** (as of 2pm, 24 May. Source: Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health - MoPH)
- Deaths from COVID-19: **218**
- Samples tested: **30,052**

Key concerns: Border crossing areas, in-country testing capacity, protective equipment for frontline workers, commodity prices, messaging and rumour management, international air services

**Situation Overview: UPDATED**

MoPH data shows that 10,582 people across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan are now confirmed to have COVID-19. Some 1,075 people have recovered, and 218 people have died. 30,052 people out of the population of 37.6 million have been tested. 13 healthcare workers are among those who have died from COVID-19. More than eight per cent of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases are among healthcare staff. The majority of the deaths were people between ages of 40 and 69. Men between the ages of 40 and 69 represent more than half of all COVID-19-related deaths. The number of recorded cases nationwide has almost doubled in just 10 days. Cases are expected to continue to increase over the weeks ahead as community transmission escalates, creating grave implications for Afghanistan’s economy and people’s well-being. Kabul remains the most affected part of the country in terms of confirmed cases, followed by Hirat, Balkh, Kandahar and Nangarhar.

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On 23 May, the Taliban announced a three-day Eid ceasefire with the Government of Afghanistan, starting today. The President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani welcomed the announcement and instructed the Afghan National Defence Security Force (ANDSF) to observe the truce.
Response Activities: UPDATED

On 22 May, the United Arab Emirates sent a plane carrying seven metric tons of medical supplies to Afghanistan. The supplies are intended to equip approximately 7,000 medical professionals as they work to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the second shipment of critical aid supplies provided by the UAE; in March 2020, the UAE dispatched an aid shipment to Afghanistan containing 20,000 testing units and medical equipment to carry out examinations for thousands of people.

For the latest update of all Cluster response activities in Afghanistan please see the latest operational Situation Report.

Cross Border: UPDATED

The Milak crossing (Nimroz) is officially open to commercial traffic and documented citizens of Afghanistan. The Islam Qala-Dogharoon land border crossings (Hirat) remain open on both sides for documented travellers and commercial traffic.

Afghanistan’s frontier with Pakistan at Spin Boldak and at Torkham remains mainly closed due to COVID-19-related restrictions, however on 1 May, the Government of Pakistan announced that both crossing points will allow pedestrian movement for stranded nationals of Afghanistan and Pakistan once a week (Saturday) to facilitate return to their respective countries. Prior to the end of Ramadan and the start of the Eid holiday, the border witnessed a higher than usual surge in returns as people began travelling home to their families. IOM reports that 3,743 citizens of Afghanistan returned from Pakistan across the border at Torkham and 4,280 people returned voluntarily through Spin Boldak, utilising an exceptional opening on 21 May. According to initial reports, health screening procedures were not followed due to the unplanned nature of the opening. On 21 May, the Embassy of Afghanistan in Islamabad announced that the border would remain open over the weekend (22-23 May). A total of 4,532 citizens of Afghanistan returned through Torkham border crossing and 6,360 crossed through Spin Boldak over the weekend. The process was reportedly more orderly than on 21 May, with health screening procedures carefully followed.

Pakistan continues to facilitate the movement of cargo trucks and containers into Afghanistan. On 15 May, the Government of Pakistan announced that the Torkham and Spin Boldak crossing points would open six days a week (except for Saturday) for commercial purposes. An unlimited number of trucks will now be allowed to pass per day. Humanitarians emphasise the critical importance of maintaining a reliable flow of traffic for humanitarian cargo and are advocating for special consideration to expedite humanitarian food and relief items through border crossings.

Borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain open only for commercial traffic and crossings of passport holders back into Afghanistan.

Operational Issues: UPDATED

The Government of Afghanistan announced on 2 May that it was extending the nationwide lockdown until 24 May in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. Current nationwide lockdown measures are being reviewed. An announcement updating the anticipated duration of the lockdown is expected to be made after Eid. However, a number of provinces have already eased their lockdowns, including Kandahar, Hilmand and Ghazni, Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Balkh, Khost, Paktya, Kunduz and Takhar provinces. On 23 May, MoPH announced that strict measures had been put in place during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays in Kabul to enforce the lockdown in the city. Humanitarian personnel, who have received permission to continue their duties amid the movement restrictions, are encouraged to monitor the situation closely.
On 17 May, Qatar Airways announced it is planning two special Doha-Kabul flights. Flights into Doha will connect out a one-way flight repatriating stranded citizens of Afghanistan from Delhi to Kabul on 23 May. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. Flights into Doha accommodate transiting passengers only. This service is planned flights departed from Kabul to Kandahar on 22 May and Hirat on 23 May, respectively. Ariana Afghan Airlines also carried passengers to further destinations through the Qatar Airway’s network. The next and final round-trip charter will be situations. The next flight is planned for Tuesday, 2 June.

On 2 May, the Government of Afghanistan announced the suspension of all commercial domestic flights until the end of June. Kam Air recently announced that it will facilitate exceptional domestic flight operations during the suspension period to three locations: Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Hirat. The flights began operation on 7 May with one flight to Mazar-e-Sharif. The next roundtrip flights are scheduled to depart from Kabul to Hirat on 27, 28, 29 and 30 May. Similarly, Ariana Afghan Airlines announced that it would also facilitate exceptional domestic flights to Kandahar and Hirat. The roundtrip flights departed from Kabul to Kandahar on 22 May and Hirat on 23 May, respectively. Ariana Afghan Airlines also carried out a one-way flight repatriating stranded citizens of Afghanistan from Delhi to Kabul on 23 May.

On 17 May, Qatar Airways announced it is planning two special Doha-Kabul flights. Flights into Doha will connect passengers to further destinations through the Qatar Airways network. The next and final round-trip charter will be departing from Doha to Kabul and back to Doha on 30 May.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) airbridge connecting Kabul and Doha is operating regularly on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. Flights into Doha accommodate transiting passengers only. This service is planned to continue until regular commercial international flights resume. UNHAS will not operate domestic flights or flights to Doha during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. However, UNHAS will remain on operational standby for any medical or security situations. The next flight is planned for Tuesday, 2 June.

More Information – Links: UPDATED

WHO

• WHO’s latest information on COVID-19
• WHO COVID-19 Global Dashboard

Government of Afghanistan:

• Ministry of Public Health: COVID-19 Dashboard

Inter-Agency Standing Committee

• IASC-endorsed COVID-19 guidance – new materials available
• Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak (available in English, Dari, Pashto)

UN and others

• ReliefWeb: COVID-19 Response Page
• ActionAid: Right to Food. Farmers’ Rights & Covid-19 - Policy priorities and a call to Action
• CaLP: Focus on gender in cash and voucher assistance responses to the Covid-19 pandemic
• GPEI: Polio eradication in the context of Covid-19
• UN Women: Fighting a hidden pandemic
• UN Women: Pocket tool for managing evaluation during the COVID-19 pandemic
• UN Women: Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls and service provision
• UN Women: Gender Alert Issue V (Afghanistan)
• UNFPA: Humanitarian Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Tip Sheet - CVA and COVID-19
• GB: Linking humanitarian cash and social protection for an effective cash response to the COVID-19 pandemic
• UNICEF, WHO: Water, sanitation, hygiene, and waste management for the COVID-19 virus - Interim guidance
• UNHCR: Supporting the continuity of health and nutrition services in the context of COVID-19 in refugee settings
• UNHCR: Priority activities in public health, WASH, shelter and settlements
• Education Cluster, Protection Cluster, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNHCR: Safe Back to School (Guide)
• CARE: Remote Humanitarian Management and Programming - Guidance Note
• FAO: Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition
• FAO: Mitigating risks to food systems during COVID-19 - Reducing food loss and waste
• NRC: Crossfire and Covid-19
• UNDP, UNODC: Ensuring Access to Justice in the Context of COVID-19
• Plan International: The impacts of COVID-19 on displaced and refugee girls and young women
• Smithsonian Science Education Center, WHO: COVID-19! How Can I Protect Myself and Others?
• Action Against Hunger, CARE + 18 more: Civil Society Call for Action to Protect Civilians
• IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, UN Women, World Bank: Justice for women amidst COVID-19
• UNICEF: South Asia COVID-19 Situation Report No. 11
• UNHCR: Asia and the Pacific COVID-19 External Update
• ICRC: ICRC working with Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) at Kabul District Hospital against COVID-19
• UNICEF, WASH Cluster: Cluster Updates (Afghanistan)
• FAO: From vulnerability to resilience in Afghanistan
• UNDP: The Social and Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Asia-Pacific Region
• MSF: Keeping essential medical services running during the COVID-19 pandemic
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Reports indicate that despite assurances from the Government that the lockdowns would not limit critical program movements of NGOs and the UN, the measures continue to impact the mobility of humanitarian organisations, delaying the delivery of assistance and affecting access to humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian partners remain active in responding to crises throughout the country and continue to urge the Government to employ a national approach to these movement issues so that individual negotiations are not required on a case-by-case basis. For additional information on access constraints, please see the C-19 Access Impediment Report.

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