



# GHD|EMPHNET COVID-19 RESPONSE

August 2020

## OVERVIEW

Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, Global Health Development | Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (GHD|EMPHNET) worked intensely at supporting countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) to strengthen their preparedness and response to the outbreak, building on its extensive experience and connection with the countries as well as the collaboration with sponsors and funders. This support was particularly targeted to countries that have Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) as these programs constitute a core constituent of the network and construct the backbone for conducting outbreak investigations and containment, ensuring sustainability of supportive action. GHD|EMPHNET through its Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology and Public Health Programs has provided support to the countries mainly through its Headquarter Office in Amman, Jordan, and through its offices and teams in the countries. The support included technical and logistical support to countries to strengthen the response to COVID-19.

GHD|EMPHNET remains dedicated to assist EMR countries meet their commitment to ensure better health for their populations and continue exploring ways to leverage support to these countries in their fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. Situation Update

COVID-19 Situation in the EMR as of 30 August 2020*	
Global	Eastern Mediterranean Region
➤ 24,854,140 cases	➤ 1,912,516 cases (8% of Global Burden) Iran represented 20% of the Regional Burden
➤ 838,924 deaths	➤ 50,704 deaths
➤ CFR 3.4%	➤ CFR 2.7%
➤ Top cumulative death toll in the US (180,689)	➤ 6% of the global burden of COVID-19 deaths

\*Source: World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Daily IMST Situation Report. (30 August 2020).

## 2. Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC)

GHD|EMPHNET escalated its efforts and activities to support EMR countries' preparedness and response capacities to COVID-19 outbreak by activating PHEMC, which has ensured provided a coordinated and targeted supported the countries through maximizing efforts, engagement, and involvement.

PHEMC has acted as the hub for coordinating the preparedness and response activities among GHD/EMPHNET's various public health programs, departments, and units. Support included areas such as supporting rapid response based on pre-identified country priorities, supporting COVID-19 focused Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), information exchange and documentation, field activities such as contact tracing and field investigation, and coordinate with other programs on providing related technical and logistical support such as supporting Lab and PPE stockpiling, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), and data collection, analysis, and research. The support has been enriched with the input and involvement of various FETPs from the region in areas such as coordination, dissemination of guidelines, regular sharing of technical updates, and others.

Specific country activities that has been implemented through the activation and coordination of PHEMC include:

- Customization of COVID-19 Rapid Response Training Curriculum including a case study supporting the capacity building team which has been shared with the countries in the region.
- Established a core team to facilitate COVID-19 repose activities in line with countries' needs, including the conduction of regular meetings with FETP directors.
- Support the development of promotional materials in counties such as Jordan and Sudan.
- Support the conduction of training workshops in Outbreak Investigation and Contact Tracing in Jordan.
- Refresher COVID-19 specific training targeting rapid responders, Sample Management at northern borders Points of Entry (PoEs), and Multi-sectoral workshop to enhance coordination mechanisms and SOPs on Case Investigation at PoEs all of which conducted in Sudan.
- Two-Day online training targeting FETPs and RRTs on Surveillance and Contact Training in Iraq.
- Two-Day online training on RCCE, contact tracing, and COVID-19 focused WASH targeting the staff of National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and relevant Partners in Libya.
- Support Jordan MOH efforts in outbreak investigation and contact tracing in Jordan (Irbid).

## 3. Disease Control

During the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdown March-June 2020, EMPHNET supported the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) in Jordan through:

- Preparation National COVID-19 emergency plan.
- Providing the lab with COVID-19 PCR kits and reagents.
- Providing Viral transport medium and Swabs (VTM) for COVOD-19 specimens collection.
- Provide with PPE's specifically N95 masks.
- Provide technical support and instructions for sample collection, preservation and transportation.
- Development of COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) curriculum.

## 4. Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

The Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization team was actively involved in the following:

- Polio Eradication and immunization team engagement with Iraqi MoH, UNICEF & WHO in developing immunization action plan during and post COVID-19 emergency and providing technical support to maintain, Routine Immunization Services during and after the outbreak.
- Afghanistan GHD/EMPHNET team actively participated in:
  - Preparation National COVID-19 emergency plan
  - Updated response guidelines and translated it to the local Language
- In Egypt GHD/EMPHNET medical officer was engaged in supporting Egypt EPI in the risk assessment, development of Risk Mitigation Plan for the EPI and development of EPI COVID-19 SOPs.
- Operatorial research: Hold another round of call for proposals that would be specific to research for COVID-19 in response to the countries COVID-19 priorities and providing evidence-based information for action; 5 proposals accepted.
- Include session on COVID-19 pandemic and IPC in the current and upcoming trainings by impeding and implementing the COVID-19 and IPC measures sessions during immunization sessions in the curriculum of the current training in polio assets the upcoming IIP trainings.
- Participation in developing the curriculum of IPC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Health Promotion and Protection

During COVID-19, GHD|EMPHNET's Health Promotion and Protection team supported the following:

- Webinar COVID-19: Towards more equitable health systems.
- Promotional messages about COVID-19 in pregnancy, breast feeding, school children.
- Conducting a Facebook online interview with Dr. Jabri from women union to talk about GBV and COVID-19.
- Developing the after COVID-19 return to workplace strategy for GHD|EMPHNET employees, procedures and promotional awareness tools.
- Working on a literature review about: COVID-19 and GBV.
- Technical note about the COVID-19 Myths.
- Classification and summarizing 120 scientific abstracts about COVID-19.

## 6. Research and Policy

Believing in the importance of conducting research during COVID-19 pandemics to better understand the spread of the disease, GHD|EMPHNET undertook the following:

- Served on the Peer Review Committee of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) expedited call for applications for the Canadian COVID-19 Rapid Research Funding Opportunity.
- Developed GHD|EMPHNETs SEAIRD Model for COVID-19 Transmission Dynamics and discussed its sharing with the countries in the region for further fitting of the model to the available data (already shared with Iraq MOH).

- Disseminated GHD|EMPHNET WEBi Series announcements to the Ministry of Health staff and FETPs in the region to ensure their participation.
- Established and supported a GHD|EMPHNET's COVID-19 Regional Research Team to study COVID-19 in the region including but not limited to the following:
  - Assessment of knowledge, attitude, and practice of the preventive sector teams during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 on Healthcare Workers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020
  - Risk factors for COVID-19 critical outcomes in EMR: A retrospective study
  - Countries Experiences in handling the COVID-19 pandemic: Public Health Challenges and lessons learnt
  - Treatment regimens used for management of COVID-19 and their effectiveness.
  - Assessing the validity of COVID-19 rapid test in Iraq.
- Published Research on COVID-19 targeting the following topics:
  - The Role of GHD|EMPHNET and the Eastern Mediterranean Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs) in preparedness for COVID-19.
  - Awareness and preparedness of FETP graduates in responding to COVID-19 the EMR: A cross-section study.
  - Mental health support in Jordan for the general population and for the refugees in the Zaatari camp during the period of COVID-19 lockdown.
  - COVID-19 crisis in Jordan: Response, scenarios, strategies, and recommendations.
  - Dentists' Awareness, Perception, and Attitude Regarding COVID-19 and Infection Control: Cross-Sectional Study among Jordanian Dentists.
- Contributed to the development and design of GHD|EMPHNET's COVID-19 Dashboard, library and other resources on COVID-19, the integration of COVID-19 resources in the Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology (CEAE) Webpage, its newsletters, and other publications.
- Contributed to the development of several COVID-19 proposals and concept papers, including:
  - Proposals submitted to IsDB, Elrha/R2HC, and other funding agencies, including one Grant Collaboration on COVID-19 and refugees (with AUB).
  - A generic concept note on People-centered COVID-19 Active Surveillance Program through the use of technology.
  - One currently under development concept paper to be submitted to USAID-NPI Call for Concept Papers (COVID-19 Round Opportunity).
- Worked closely with ICT team on the development and design of different data collection forms and questionnaires for Kobo Toolbox and Go Data platforms.

## 7. Workforce Capacity

Giving high emphasis to the importance of workforce capacity in strengthening health systems, GHD|EMPHNET escalated its building capacity efforts during COVID-19 by doing the following:

- Developed COVID-19 case studies and translated into Arabic.

- Customized the 3-month PHEP-BFE to address COVID-19.
- Trained over 100 RRTs in Sudan.
- Supported Sudan to design, develop and print health promotional materials.
- Supported response missions in Sudan.
- Supported Sudan to train workforce at points of entry.
- Conducted IPC training program for Caritas in Jordan.
- Supported development of six proposals by FETP graduates that are related to COVID-19 in Sudan.
- Served on the Peer Review Committee of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) expedited call for applications for the Canadian COVID-19 Rapid Research Funding Opportunity.
- Attending TEPHINET Global webinars
- Attending Africa CDC webinars on IPC
- Joined the COVID-19 taskforce
- Participated in the development of proposals for COVID-19 as follow: IDB, UNICEF, CDC, USAID

## **8. Knowledge Exchange and Networking**

GHD|EMPHNET considers knowledge exchange and networking essential for promoting public health practice and for developing and maintaining essential communication channels that are bound to increase knowledge empowerment. Following is what GHD|EMPHNET completed in knowledge exchange and networking during COVID-19:

- Updated EpiShares with news about COVID-19.
- Created a private group on EpiShares for FETP Directors.
- Updated the e-library with COVID-19 resources.
- Gathered and disseminated daily news updates on COVID-19.
- Presented at TEPHINET Teleconference GHD|EMPHNET's COVID-19 activities in May.
- Published a special FETP newsletter edition focusing on FETP response to COVID-19 in the EMR.
- Conducted the Voices from the Field Writing Contest focusing on COVID-19.
- Launched GHD|EMPHNET WEBi Series and organizing a series of webinars on COVID-19.