



GHD|EMPHNET COVID-19 RESPONSE

March 2021

OVERVIEW

Global Health Development | Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (GHD|EMPHNET) continues to work intensely at supporting countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) to strengthen their preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 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 component of the network and construct the backbone for conducting outbreak investigations and containment, ensuring sustainability of supportive action. GHD|EMPHNET through its Public Health Programs and the Center of Excellence for Applied Epidemiology has been providing support to the countries mainly through its Headquarter Office in Amman, Jordan, and through its offices and teams in countries of the EMR. 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.

Situation Update

COVID-19 Situation in the EMR as of 28 March 2021*	
Global	Eastern Mediterranean Region
➤ 126,372,442 cases	➤ 7,395,085 cases (6% of Global Burden) Iran represented 25% of the Regional Burden
➤ 2,769,696 deaths	➤ 156,891 deaths
➤ CFR 2.2%	➤ CFR 2%
➤ Top cumulative death toll in the US (543,003)	➤ 6% of the global burden of COVID-19 deaths Top cumulative death in Iran (62,308)

*Source: World Health Organization, COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Data as received by WHO from national authorities, as of 28 March 2021, 10 am CET

1. Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC)

Acting as the coordinating hub to support emergency preparedness and response among GHD/EMPHNET's various public health programs, departments, and units, PHEMC continued to provide its support to countries in the EMR by maximizing their efforts, engagement, and involvement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. PHEMC continued to support rapid response activities, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), information exchange and documentation, field activities such as contact tracing and field investigation, and strengthening event-based surveillance.

Throughout the last quarter, PHEMC has supported the emergency preparedness and response efforts in the EMR through the following activities:

- Successfully supported the provision of additional rapid response refresher training with focus on COVID-19, targeting previously trained Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and field epidemiology professionals including some FETP graduates in Yemen and Afghanistan. This training was followed with PHEMC supporting an in-country deployment of the trained RRTs in priority areas aiming to contribute to country alertness and response to emergencies in Yemen and Afghanistan.
- Finalized the preparatory phase in coordination with the CDC Global Border Health Team (GBHT) and the National team in Morocco for the implementation of Border Health activities that aim to support forecasting communicable diseases spread based on population movement and prioritize the priority Points of Entry (POEs) which are considered higher risk for public health issues. This will be through supporting adaptation of risk mapping tools and conduct risk mapping to forecast communicable disease spread.
- Preparations for the implementation of Border Health activities in Morocco that aim to support port staff and build their capacity to carry an effective emergency planning and response process are still ongoing.
- Coordinated with the CDC GBHT and the national consultants from Libya and Tunisia to finalize reparations to initiate the activities to support cross-border health activities which aim at coaching Tunisia and Libya to develop and test a joint cross-border public health emergency response operational plan and develop related SOPs that address the ongoing crisis in both countries.
- Successfully implemented a project with Public Health England that aimed to understand how multi-sector coordination has been operationalized and is positively contributing to the response to COVID-19 in the region. This was accomplished through conducting a structured joint regional virtual meeting in February.
- Continued to provide logistical support to Afghanistan in strengthening their integrated event-based surveillance (EBS) system. Additionally, two consultants were recently assigned to provide support in strengthening EBS in Sudan and Libya.
- Ongoing efforts to conduct an assessment of the COVID-19 surveillance in Iraq. The assessment protocol was developed and sent to CDC for review.

GHD|EMPHNET has been highly contributing to supporting AFRICA CDC in training and deployment of 1000 Community Health Workers (CHW) in a number of EMR countries; namely Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco. This comes in support of the collaboration of all stakeholders to meet the African Unions' target of deploying 1 Million Community Health worker by the end of 2020. Under the partnership for accelerating COVID19 testing (PACT initiative). GHD|EMPHNET worked on high levels of technical and operational coordination with National representatives from the Ministries of Health in targeted countries to conduct training of trainer workshops to selected health staff that will replicate the training to 200 CHW in each country. During the last three months, GHD|EMPHNET focused on the following in each country of the initiative:

- **Egypt**

The first phase of PACT has been finalized in Egypt during the first week of January. Egypt has showed interest in receiving additional support to continue for a second phase of PACT activities and had submitted a new

workplan targeting Al-Behira governorate with 200 new CHW who will be trained and deployed for the next phase. The new plan is currently being reviewed and the next phase is expected to commence during the first half of April.

- **Somalia**

The first phase of PACT has been finalized in Somalia during the 4th week of January. Somalia has showed interest in receiving additional support to continue for a second phase of PACT activities and had submitted a new workplan targeting new towns of Afgoi and Bulo-burte. The new plan is currently being reviewed and the next phase is expected to commence during the first half of April.

- **Morocco**

Following the successful completion of a 2-day virtual training of trainers for 10 health supervisors on COVID19 and CHW was conducted in Morocco, the first group of CHW in Fas-Miknas and Tantan were trained during the first half of March. The training sessions will continue until all 200 CHW workers are trained and deployed in the field.

- **Sudan**

The first phase of PACT has been finalized in Sudan during the first week of January. Sudan has expressed interest in receiving additional support to continue for a second phase of PACT activities and had submitted a new workplan that included the expansion of CHW targeted by training by adding 300 additional CHW who will be trained and deployed to new areas during the next phase. The new plan is currently being reviewed and the next phase is expected to commence during the first half of April.

In summary, all training of trainers (ToT) activities had been finalized in all four countries. 40 health supervisors were trained on the main aspects of community health work (CHW) and contact tracing to accelerate COVID19 testing in targeted countries. In each country, the National coordinator took lead and 10 supervisors have replicated the training to 200 CHWs, summing up to reach a total of 800 CHW trained and deployed to the field upon completion of these training sessions. While all field deployment activities have come to conclusion in each of Somalia, Egypt, and Sudan, CHW started field sensitization and contact tracing activities during the first week of April and will continue for three months until the first week June.

2. Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

During the last quarter, the Polio and RI team has conducted the following in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq:

- GHD continues working MoH to finalize development of health promotional materials to increase population demand for vaccination and to minimize the harmful impact of COVID-19 emergency on immunization. A progress has been achieved, as the final version of poster has been approved by MoH and GHD, and in its way for distribution and posted in selected sites and a video spot were conducted jointly with a media company in Iraq. The video spot will be available to be broadcasted the video using TV and social media channels.
- To reach and vaccinate defaulters and unimmunized children in hard-to-reach areas, GHD supported Iraq in implementation outreach immunization sessions in two high risk provinces: Diyala and Diwaniya. Preparation for sessions implementation was completed and an operational microplan was developed in the 12 districts in Diyala and Diwaniya. The operationalized microplan includes the places of vulnerable population in hard-to-reach areas and areas with high numbers of unimmunized children and dropout to be covered by each team in every session. A total number of 489 outreach immunization sessions were carried out in Diyala and 256 sessions in Diwaniya. Furthermore, GHD supported conduction of 358 field supervisory visits by EPI provincial and district focal point to oversee and check the quality of sessions implementation. The teams also were provided with personal protection equipment (PPE) and sanitizers to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection. The teams succeed to provide a total number of 15629 doses of different vaccines in Diyala for children under 5 years, and 17047 for children under 5 years of age, and 913 TT vaccine for CBW in Diwaniya. Feedback from the Iraqi MoH revealed that this support resulted in increase of immunization coverage in both provinces.

- GHD contributed to developing the NDVP for introduction of COVID-19 vaccine jointly with MOH and other partners. Furthermore, GHD contributed to smooth introduction of COVID-19 vaccine through supporting conduction 47 training workshops on rollout COVID-19 vaccine in two provinces: Thi-Qar, Kerbala and two important sites Medical city and Ibn Sina Hospitals. A total number of 670 health staff in the districts, hospitals and vaccination sites were trained on COVID-19 vaccines types, targeted age groups, organization of vaccination sessions at the vaccination sites, vaccine storage and handling, vaccine administration, AEFI and reporting, communication with public, registration electronic Platform and reporting and medical waste management.

During the last quarter, GHD|EMPHNET contributed to the following COVID-19 related Activities in Afghanistan:

- To improve immunization frontline workers' capabilities in limiting the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission during vaccination sessions in priority provinces in Afghanistan, GHD|EMPHNET, in close coordination with MoPH Afghanistan, successfully completed a ToT at the national level and trained a total of 22 trainers to rollout this training in respective provinces. Likewise, GHD|EMPHNET country team successfully conducted four training sessions on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and a total of 120 EPI frontline workers were trained at the provincial level.
- GHD|EMPHNET country team actively participated in developing the country prioritization plan for COVID-19 vaccination and actively participated in COVID-19 vaccine introduction and distribution at the national and sub-national level.
- GHD|EMPHNET country team conducted provincial training to the EPI frontline worker to facilitate the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- GHD|EMPHNET country team supervised the process of COVID- 19 vaccine implementation.
- During the last quarter GHD|EMPHNET supported 480 supportive supervision missions in Afghanistan to strengthen routine immunization and minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission to the health worker.
- During the reported period, GHD|EMPHNET country team visited 6 provinces. These missions were not only to provide technical support to the routine immunization but also followed up the national emergency action plan at the provincial level that was developed during the previous quarter.

Additionally, the following activities were conducted:

- GHD|EMPHNET continued to build on its accumulative experience in supporting routine immunization microplanning of the recently developed training package to support KP province in Pakistan for routine immunization microplanning in low performing districts in the context of COVID 19.
- Continued to support countries in documenting their integration between polio and immunization functions within primary health care as an approach that can help build more resilient systems.
- A new project in collaboration with CDC has started with the aim to prepare for the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines by assessing social and behavioral determinants for under vaccination in the EMRO region. This multi-country assessment focuses on understanding determinants of demand for COVID-19 and other vaccines among priority populations, particularly the role of rumors and misinformation on behavior, and a secondary focus on challenges in vaccine service delivery faced by healthcare workers (HCWs) and program administrators. For the purpose of this project, GHD|EMPHNET logistically supported 3 implementing partners with contractual agreements to carry out the assessment in five selected countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Additionally, GHD|EMPHNET took the lead in conducting regional social listening activities to understand the behavioral determinants of the COVID-19 vaccine uptake in the region. For the latter activity, six sub-regional social media monitoring officers were assigned for social media data collection.

3. Disease Control and prevention

During the last quarter, the DCP team has conducted the following activities in coordination with the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) in Jordan to respond to the COVID-10 pandemic:

- Support laboratory electronic data base and COVID-19 results entry
- Support laboratory quality control activities (Internal and external)
- Support laboratory supplies tractability and inventory
- Support equipment inventory and preventive maintenance
- Coordinate samples collection with investigation teams

4. Research and Policy & Knowledge Exchange and Networking

During this quarter, the Research and Policy Unit has been closely involved in all preparations for the coming EMPHNET Regional COVID-19 Operational Research Symposium (April 7 – 8, 2021) through regular attendance in the symposium meetings. These efforts include: review and provision of technical inputs on all symposium documents and related online resources, including the symposium platform/website interface, following up with the potential speakers, presenters, and symposium participants, evaluation, selection, and finalization of the abstracts, and other tasks, as required.

5. Workforce Capacity

GHD|EMPHNET has recently launched three online courses targeting health professionals and other relevant staff who are involved in managing and responding to public health emergencies, specifically the COVID-19 response. During the last quarter, 2,6767 registered in these courses and 1,416 were successfully certified after completion of the courses.