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Global Health  
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EMPHNET  
The Eastern Mediterranean  
Public Health Network

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# Quarterly Newsletter

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The COVID-19 pandemic has overwhelmed health systems around the world with extraordinary challenges. With rising cases, health systems have been overburdened with a huge number of hospitalizations. Developed and developing countries alike have suffered shortages in medical supplies, and there has been an urgent need for more health personnel. While facing these COVID-challenges, health systems must maintain essential health services to care for children, mothers, the elderly, and those who suffer from chronic and infectious diseases.

As a key player in global and public health, GHD | EMPHNET has worked closely with ministries of health (MoHs) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) as

Programs (FETPs) in numerous activities related to preparedness and response. We have also given special attention to creating awareness about the disease through our various online platforms, and we have been in regular contact with partners, ensuring exchange of relevant experience and coordinating mobilization of human and material resources where needed. To ensure our support for the region is more efficient and synergized, we launched our Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to COVID-19.

As the lockdown eased in the region lately, GHD|EMPHNET re-opened its head office in Jordan while keeping with safety precautions and began to continue regular project activities on the ground. We continued our support for strengthened routine immunization in high-risk countries, prevention and control of infectious diseases, surveillance of antimicrobial resistance, maternal health, and more. We are ensuring the continuity of our projects which are of significance to meeting the health needs of communities in the EMR.

## Feature Story

### Creating Opportunities for Virtual Dialogue through Our WEBi Series Initiative



**EMPHNET**  
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**EMPHNET WEBi Series**

**Implementating Strategies for Easing off COVID-19 Restrictions**

**Tuesday, June 16, 2020**  
17:00 to 18:30 Jordan local time (UTC+3)

 <p><b>Dr. Seif Al Abri</b> Director General of Disease Surveillance and Control, The Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman</p>	<p><b>Facilitator</b></p> 	 <p><b>Dr. Mohammed Youbi</b> Director of the Directorate of Epidemiology, Ministry of Health Morocco</p>
 <p><b>Dr. Mark Salter</b> Consultant in Global Health Senior Medical Advisor Public Health England</p>	<p><b>Dr. Faris Lami</b> Public Health Expert Associate Professor, University of Baghdad, Iraq</p>	 <p><b>Dr. Wessam Mankoula</b> Lead of Emergency Operations Centre, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(ACDC)</p>

**The webinar will focus on**

- 1- Ensuring appropriate measures are satisfied when easing off COVID-19 restrictions
- 2- Adopting a flexible and informed approach for easing off COVID-19 restrictions
- 3- Country experience with easing off COVID-19 restrictions



**COVID-19  
Response**

GHD|EMPHNET with you against COVID-19

Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, GHD|EMPHNET has been very active in supporting partners' and countries across the EMR. We have worked with partners through our Public Health Medical Emergency Center (PHEMC) to improve countries'

To optimize the timely and efficient use of information that can foster actions and decisions concerning the changing circumstances of the pandemic, we launched our Webinar initiative “EMPHNET WEBi Series,” which serves as a virtual dialogue platform set to engage a broad range of audience in support of encouraging online discussions. This series of webinars brings to the forefront important public health issues and problems challenging the EMR. Considering the current COVID-19 pandemic, the WEBi Series is expected to channel information and to enable the exchange of knowledge applicable to COVID-19 areas of concern as well as other public health issues in the long run. Webinars hosted within this series will become a major knowledge exchange tool for GHD|EMPHNET’s s public health programs.

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## Spotlight on Public Health Experts

**Dr. Nissaf Ben Alaya**

Dr. Nissaf Ben Alaya has over 20 years of experience working in the field of public health. Dr. Ben Alaya completed her medical degree and residency in Tunisia and then moved to France to further specialize in preventive medicine, public health, epidemiology, and biostatistics. At the Faculty of Medicine in Tunis, she serves as an Associate Professor of Preventive and Community Medicine and as Head of the Research Laboratory for Prevention and Epidemiology of Non-communicable Diseases. She has been the General Director of the National Observatory of New and Emerging Diseases (ONMNE) since 2015 and the Director of the Tunisia FETP since its launch in

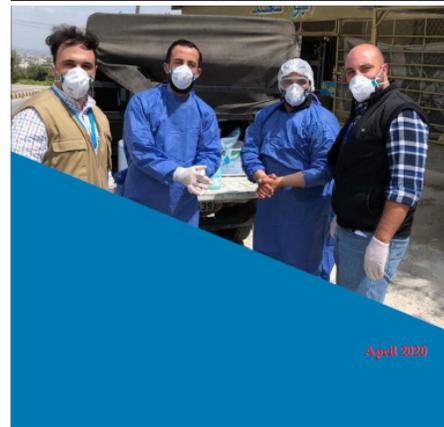
## News updates

### GHD|EMPHNET Launches Its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to COVID-19

In the earliest stages of the COVID-19 threat, GHD|EMPHNET began to work with countries in the EMR towards supporting national and regional preparedness and response to COVID-19. Considering the World Health Organization Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO-EMRO) COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan and the Global COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Strategy, we have developed the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to COVID-19 for a more coherent and efficient support to the diverse needs of the countries in the face of an unprecedented outbreak.

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### STRATEGIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN TO COVID-19



### GHD|EMPHNET Joins Ending Pandemics and Partners to Improve AMR Surveillance in Africa and Asia

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) causes antimicrobial drugs to become ineffective in treating infections, resulting in lengthened disease duration and increased risk of disease transmission. AMR affects humans, animals, and the environment. A health threat which also poses economic burdens, AMR is estimated to be predominant in low and middle-income countries (LMIC) where misuse of antibiotics is prevalent due to poverty and weakened health systems.

To control AMR in LMIC, Ending Pandemics, through its program [CORDS Networks](#), is implementing the project "Partnership for AMR Surveillance Excellence (PARSE)," within its work to Improve laboratory capacity for diagnosis and surveillance of AMR in low-income countries where AMR has a disproportionate impact. Supported by Fleming Fund UK, the PARSE project aims to develop common protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for AMR surveillance through mapping, analyzing gaps, and assessing capacities of sixteen countries in four regions: East & Southern Africa, South East Asia, South Asia, and West Africa.

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### **GHD|EMPHNET Supports Egypt Ministry Health and Population (MoHP) in COVID-19 Response**

Over the past few months, the Egypt MoHP has been working with its partners to fight the COVID-19 pandemic across all governorates of the country. GHD|EMPHNET joined this fight by providing the needed support to the MoHP in several activities implemented in responding to the pandemic. These activities include training workshops conducted for activating RRTs at the national and subnational level; training hotline “105” personnel to answer public questions related to COVID-19; creating a team of trainers from health educators to increase public awareness; training lab personnel on COVID-19 testing; and updating surveillance officers at the national level on effective contact tracing. Other activities that we have supported include field visits conducted to trace contacts and the creation of COVID-19 communication material.

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### **GHD|EMPHNET Contributes to EMR Public Health Research**

#### *Publishing Papers in Peer-Reviewed Journals*

In keeping with its ongoing contribution to public health research and in response to increasing demands to generate scientific knowledge on COVID-19, GHD|EMPHNET has worked on several papers that were accepted for publication in international peer-reviewed journals. Not only do these papers explore various COVID-19 contexts in the region, but they also open the door for further study into relevant areas of research.

#### *Identifying Research Priorities in the EMR*

Organizations conducting or funding public health research must select research priorities while often facing competing demands and scarce resources. The identification of research needs is a complex task, with little information on how well the various methods for identifying research topics work. Additionally, the range of health challenges is wide with countries having their own priorities influenced by a range of factors. This pinpoints the significance of ensuring the alignment of the national research capacity with the global research environment and the sources of research funding.

GHD|EMPHNET took the initiative to explore research priorities in public health and technology within the EMR. While this initiative was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be implemented again to capture the impact of COVID-19 on health population and health services.

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### **GHD|EMPHNET Continues to Support Activities for Strengthened Routine Immunization During COVID-19**

*Supporting Inter-personal Communication Training Towards Improved Vaccination Coverage in Afghanistan*

Supported by GHD|EMPHNET, the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) conducted two training workshops on inter-personal communication and effectiveness of vaccines targeting over 50 vaccinators and volunteer community health workers in the province of Nangarhar. Taking place in June 2020, these training workshops form part of a training package to create demand for immunization in low- performance provinces with high dropout rates.

*Supporting Implementation of Polio/Routine Immunization Communications' Training Needs Assessment in Iraq*

In collaboration with the Iraq Ministry of Health (MoH), GHD|EMPHNET completed a communication training needs assessment for Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). Conducted between June 21 and 25, 2020, the assessment targeted six provinces: Baghdad Resafa, Misan, Najaf, Salahaldin, Suelimaniya, and Wasit. These represent the north, south, the capital, mid-Euphrates, and the retaken provinces. The participants were a sample from healthcare workers working in vaccination and representing all levels of the health.

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### **GHD|EMPHNET Hosts Interactive Q&A Sessions to Raise Awareness on COVID-19**

To foster fruitful interactions between experts and the public in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, GHD|EMPHNET continues to hold periodic Facebook Q&A sessions that cover different aspects of public health related to the pandemic. Being real-time events, they create an opportunity for the public to communicate directly with experts

and share concerns and suggestions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past quarter, GHD|EMPHNET hosted ten sessions, focusing on public health issues relevant to COVID-19 such as nutrition; breastfeeding; mental health; vaccine updates; and stigma and discrimination. Experts were from various countries in the region, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Sudan; with audiences watching from across the region.

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### **GHD|EMPHNET Cooperates with Global and Regional Partners in Responding to COVID-19**

#### *Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) 27<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee Meeting*

In the past quarter, GHD|EMPHNET participated in GOARN's 27<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee (SCOM) Meeting held virtually between June 29-30, 2020. In this meeting, SCOM members discussed opportunities and challenges in coordinating GOARN COVID-19 response as well as other outbreaks such as Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Partners also discussed updates on collaborations in various areas in relation to COVID-19, including strengthening contact tracing and Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE).

#### *GOARN Global Online Consultation on Contact Tracing For COVID-19*

Between June 9 and 11, 2020, GOARN and other stakeholders organized an online consultation on contact tracing for COVID-19. GHD|EMPHNET participated in this consultation along with other GOARN partners.

#### *WHO-EMRO Partners' Meeting*

GHD|EMPHNET has been participating in meetings held by WHO-EMRO for its partners in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic to discuss the regional epidemiological situation on COVID-19 and other relevant updates. In these virtual meetings, partners share knowledge and experience on the main pillars of outbreak response, including disease surveillance, contact tracing, inter-personal communication (IPC), and risk communication. [▶ Read More](#)

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### **EMPHNET Joins UN and Partners in Launching Guidelines to Address the Needs of Most Vulnerable Groups during COVID-19**

The new guidelines "COVID-19: How Can Risk Communication and Community Engagement Include Marginalized and Vulnerable People in the Eastern Mediterranean Region" have been issued by the Eastern Mediterranean RCCE Working Group, an inter-agency coordination platform established to provide technical support to COVID-19 preparedness and response in the region. The practical guidelines explain the vulnerability of marginalized groups to the pandemic and how national and local efforts can address them so that no one is left behind.

The RCCE Working Group consists of a wide range of organizations including UN Women, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the International Organization for Migration, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and EMPHNET.



## EMPHNET Contributes to Raising Awareness on COVID-19 and Zoonotic Diseases in Jordan

During the lockdown in Jordan, EMPHNET initiated a series of online social and behavior change communication (SBCC) sessions in collaboration with the Royal Health Awareness Society (RHAS). Using online tools, fifteen sessions were conducted for 500 participants during the three months of lockdown.

Health workers, volunteers from NGOs and CBOs, medical students, housewives, and staff from pharmaceutical companies took part in these sessions which focused on COVID-19, its signs and symptoms, prevention and treatment, and possibilities of developing a vaccine. Other sessions focused on common zoonotic diseases such as brucellosis and rabies since most of sources of infectious disease

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## COVID-19 Dashboard

**Data Source:**  
The data repository for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Visual Dashboard operated by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering (JHU CSSE)

**How to Use:**  
Use the buttons on the right side to navigate to the desired page or use the arrows below to navigate left and right  
To go back to this page: click on back to landing button

Global Data

Detailed per country

EMR countries

GHD| EMPHNET's COVID-19 Dashboard Provides Data on EMR

GHD continues to provide up-to-date data and statistics on COVID-19 cases focusing on the EMR. Using statistics provided by the Johns Hopkins University, we developed and launched the COVID-19 dashboard for EMR countries which provides up-to-date data on number of cases, recoveries, and deaths. To view the dashboard, visit our website [here](#).



## Public Health Issue in Focus

### EMR Countries Respond to COVID-19 Despite Challenges

The EMR is one of the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflict, economic instability, and population displacement are among the many challenges exacerbating many of the region's countries' already weak health system.

In the region, FETPs have played a pivotal role in supporting ministries of health in their response to COVID-19. FETPs in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, KSA, Pakistan Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen have been deeply involved in actions responding to COVID-19, armed with epidemiologic capacities that are crucial to investigate and contain disease outbreaks. Residents and graduates bravely joined the public health workforce in their respective countries, strengthening health system's capacity to detect, notify, report, and respond to COVID-19.

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