



GHD|EMPHNET COVID-19 RESPONSE

December 2020

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 Center of Public Health Programs and 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 27 December 2020*	
Global	Eastern Mediterranean Region
➤ 79,231,893 cases	➤ 4,823,157 cases (8% of Global Burden) Iran represented 20% of the Regional Burden
➤ 1,754,574 deaths	➤ 119,004 deaths
➤ CFR 2.2%	➤ CFR 2.5%
➤ Top cumulative death toll in the US (328,014)	➤ 6% of the global burden of COVID-19 deaths

*Source: World Health Organization, COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Data as received by WHO from national authorities, as of 27 December 2020, 10 am CET (27 December 2020).

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:

- Supported the provision of rapid response refresher training with focus on COVID-19, targeting previously trained Rapid Response Teams (RRTs). This training will be followed with 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.
- Ongoing coordination with Morocco to prepare for the implementation of activities that aim to support port staff and build their capacity to carry an effective emergency planning and response process. This will be through training a cadre of Port Health staff on the principles and practices of developing public health emergency response plans and procedures, and roll out the training to health and non-health Point of Entry (POE)
- Ongoing coordination with Morocco 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.
- Initiated communications and coordination 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.
- Ongoing work on the implementation of a joint project with Public Health England to understand how multi-sector coordination has been operationalized and is positively contributing to the response to COVID-19 in the region through conducting a structured joint regional virtual meeting.
- Provided logistical support to Afghanistan in strengthening their integrated event-based surveillance (EBS) system. An EBS consultant in Afghanistan has been assigned and supported to carry out a landscape analysis of the surveillance infrastructure and successfully established an EBS technical working group that works on the identification of EBS sources, develop EBS SOPs prioritizing the list of signals, and integrating the EBS into current surveillance systems.

Additionally, GHD|EMPHNET has been highly contributing to supporting AFRICA CDC in training and deployment of 1000 Community Health Workers (CHW) in five 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.

- **Egypt**

Providing logistical support to facilitate the post training deployment of 10 health supervisors and 200 CHW in Qalioubiya governorate in Egypt. Masks, sanitizers, flag jackets and infrared thermometers were provided to the deployed teams. Continued follow up and communication was maintained with the national coordinator from MoH during the reporting period. The work included intensive field sensitization activities that were implemented in collaboration with "100 million SEHA initiative" to support Women's Health were encouraging beneficiaries to take all preventive measures and to self-reporting for any respiratory symptoms. Moreover, the workers reached out to religious leaders in mosques and churches to carry the awareness messages in local communities.

- **Somalia**

Providing technical and logistical back-stopping support to the FMoH in Somalia by training and deploying 10 health supervisors and 200 CHW in Marka and Belet Weyne towns of Somalia. Masks, sanitizers, and infrared thermometers were provided to the deployed teams. The training sessions were also attended by local volunteers from Ayoub Organization (National Non-governmental Organization) whose staff supported field deployment and communication with local communities for improving awareness in targeted towns.

- **Tunisia and Morocco**

Coordinating with high-level officials and representatives from the Ministries of Health in Tunisia and Morocco to initiate the implementation process in the two countries. A 2-day virtual training of trainers for 10 health supervisors on COVID19 and CHW was conducted in each country, which is going to be replicated to community health workers at sub-national levels in different governorates.

- **Sudan**

Coordinating with the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) in Sudan to provide technical and logistical support needed to conduct a training of trainers for 10 health supervisors and CHW in Khartoum governorate in Sudan. Masks, sanitizers, flag jackets and infrared thermometers were provided to the deployed teams.

2. Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization

The Polio and RI team has conducted the following in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Continued its support to the Iraqi EPI program to improve community demand for vaccination and to minimize the harmful impact of COVID-19 emergency on immunization. By working with the Iraqi MoH to develop health promotional materials to increase public awareness and demand for vaccination, a technical group was established to develop, design & test videos, posters, and brochures. Two meetings were conducted so far where draft messages were developed. GHD will provide support to broadcast key messages using TV and social media channels.
- Supporting the EPI program in Iraq to reach and vaccinate defaulters and unimmunized children due to disruption of immunization services during COVID-19 emergency:
 - Jointly with the Iraqi MoH, preparations for two meetings in two high risk provinces (Diyala and Diwaniya) have been completed to review, update, and operationalize RI micro plans, the meetings will be conducted early Jan 2021. Each meeting will be attended by 25 EPI and cold chain focal points from 12 districts. The meeting will help in developing an updated operationalized micro plan to reach and vaccinate every child everywhere according to the national schedule.
- GHD is supporting the implementation of outreach immunization sessions in hard-to-reach areas in Diyala and Diwaniya in Iraq to reach and vaccinate defaulters and unimmunized children. The teams will be provided with personal protection equipment (PPE) and sanitizers to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection.
- Supported 480 supportive supervision missions in Afghanistan to strengthen routine immunization and minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission to health workers.
- The Afghanistan 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.
- Trained more than 200 EPI front line worker (vaccinator and CHWs) on Interpersonal Communication (IPC) in Afghanistan. Through this training the EPI frontline workers were trained on COVID-19 transmission and preventions to convey these messages to the beneficiaries.
- Actively participated in developing the National Action Plan for COVID-19 vaccine deployment in Afghanistan. In this action plan, 20 percent of the population will be covered, so the population is prioritized in seven categories as follows:
 - Health workers (public and private)
 - People with Chronic Diseases, Comorbidities, People with Age above 50 years, and the Pregnant Women

- Prisoners
 - The defense and security forces such as Afghan National Army (ANA) Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Directorate of Security (NDS).
 - Students in Hostels in the universities, professional schools, and training institutions
 - Nomad
 - Children under one year of age.
- GHD|EMPHNET is working with MoPH in Afghanistan to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission during the vaccination sessions, through improving the capability of immunization frontline workers. Therefore GHD|EMPHNET with close coordination of MoPH established a taskforce to develop and translate the Infection prevention and Control (IPC) training materials. GHD|EMPHNET has a plan to train around 300 EPI frontline workers in the coming couple of months. Before that GHD|EMPHNET will conduct a ToT at the national level in early January 2021. The aim of this training is to build the capacity of immunization frontline worker in limiting the risk of COVID-19 transmission during the vaccination sessions and will not let to drop down the immunization coverage.
 - GHD|EMPHNET Built on its accumulative experience in supporting routine immunization microplanning. And 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. GHD|EMPHNT completed the development of the training material for Sudan in consultation with the National EPI program, to build capacity to develop the country micro plan for 2021; this material accommodates the COVID 19 context and its consequences on routine immunization delivery. This training targets states and locality officers while the health ministry will support the facility level's microplanning exercise.
 - Supporting countries in documenting their integration between polio and immunization functions within primary health care as an approach that can help build more resilient systems. This effort started after the regional virtual workshop that discussed COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on RI/PEI integration with the participation of CDC, WHO/EMRO, UNICEF/MENARO, Gavi and BMGF, as well as country teams from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

3. Disease Control

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

- Support laboratory electronic data and results entry.
- Support laboratory quality control activities.
- Support laboratory supplies tractability and inventory.
- Participate in the MOH/laboratory inspection committee visiting private labs to check quality of COVID-19 diagnostics.
- Support equipment inventory and preventive maintenance.
- Coordinate samples collection with investigation teams.

4. Health Promotion and Protection

The HPP team collaborated with the Knowledge Exchange and Networking team in bringing experts together to the COVID-19 related webinars for exchanging knowledge, best practices; providing answers to questions related to responding to NCDs during public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic; gaining in-depth knowledge from selected countries on the extent to which NCD programs and services have been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic; exploring applicable sustainable solutions for integrating NCD services as part of the COVID-19 response; and providing lessons learned and their utilization for building resilient health system.

5. Research and Policy

GHD|EMPHNET and the Ministry of Health Discusses COVID-19 Modelling Approaches

On November 2, 2020, GHD|EMPHNET had a technical meeting with the Ministry of Health (MOH). The objective of the meeting was to review the available COVID-19 modelling approaches and discuss the possibility of applying them in Jordan.

The meeting attendees included Dr. Saad Kharabsheh and Dr. Bassam Hijawi from MOH and Dr. Mohannad Al-Nsour, Dr. Adel Belbaisi, Dr. Yousef Khader, and Dr. Mirwais Amiri from GHD|EMPHNET. During the meeting, the participants presented and discussed multiple models including:

1. SEAIRD Model developed by GHD|EMPHNET.
2. CoMo Model developed by CoMo Consortium or the COVID-19 International Modelling Consortium led by WHO and Oxford University and consisting of working members from 22 countries.
3. Imperial College London (ICL) or MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis COVID-19 Scenario Analysis Tool.
4. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation or IHME COVID-19 Projections Model.

Different COVID-19 scenarios were discussed as possibilities for Jordan. GHD|EMPHNET will await MOH's further notice for future technical discussions in this regard.

6. Workforce Capacity

- **GHD|EMPHNET's Workforce Capacity Unit Submits Manuscript Titled "Future of Public Health Post COVID-19" to the JMIR.**

During this quarter, the Workforce Capacity unit has written a manuscript titled "Future of Public Health post COVID-19". The unit has successfully submitted the manuscript for publication to the Journal of Medical Internet Research (JMIR). The paper highlights the current efforts and interventions that various stakeholders have carried out to control COVID-19. Besides, the paper has identified the main challenges and the expected changes in the future of public health at global, regional, and national levels. The paper concluded that COVID-19 will likely have permeant effects on public health and life, in general, will never be the same as before COVID-19.

- **GHD|EMPHNET Continues to Work within a Regional Senior COVID-19 Research Group**

In June 2020, GHD|EMPHNET has established a regional senior COVID-19 research group to identify research priorities, support, and oversee research activities for COVID-19 in the region. Six countries including Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan are participating in this activity with a focal point for each to facilitate the implementation and dissemination of the national and regional research. The team worked on the following research titles (data collection, analysis and writing manuscripts) with several meetings being held to coordinate the work between countries. Each country led one of the below-mentioned research titles, and all countries are working simultaneously to share, document, and publish their experience on country and regional levels.

Proposed project	Researcher/Country
Risk Factors of COVID-19 Critical Outcomes in EMRO Region, 2020: A Retrospective Study	Dr.Hiba – Iraq Dr.Maisa - Sudan
The Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 on Healthcare Workers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020	Dr.Yasser Ghaleb - Yemen
Severity and clinical outcomes of COVID-19 and their predictors among patients in the Islamabad Rawalpindi region of Pakistan.	Dr.Hasham Akhtar - Pakistan
Morocco Experience in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic: Public Health Challenges and lessons learnt	Dr.Abdelaziz Barkia - Morocco
Knowledge, attitude, and practice of the public health workers for COVID-19 pandemic control	Dr.Salma Afifi - Egypt

- **GHD|EMPHNET Launches Online Courses on Response to Public Emergencies**

As the countries' training needs are increasing to build their capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, 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.

These courses come at a relevant time and are designed to offer health professionals, public health workers, support staff and students with the skills they need to enhance their performance and deepening their knowledge, in areas related to COVID-19 response activities.

These three courses cover the areas of "Risk Communication", "Infection Prevention and Control", and "Rapid Response Teams for COVID-19". The courses adopt the online Self-Based Learning model, whereby sessions are designed to be interactive with voice explanation in two languages, English and Arabic. Upon completion, participants receive a certificate of course completion."

7. Knowledge Exchange and Networking

To continue its contribution to increased knowledge empowerment that promotes public health practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Knowledge Exchange and Networking (KEN) team has achieved the following:

- **GHD|EMPHNET Continues its WEBi Series**

The EMPHNET WEBi Series continues its run with two webinars held this quarter. These webinars covered different topics pertaining to COVID-19. They were titled "Event-based Surveillance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Progress and Best Practices", and "A new lens for NCDs in the context of COVID-19" respectively.

- **GHD|EMPHNET Releases New Edition of its FETP Newsletter**

On October 31, the Knowledge Exchange and Networking Unit published the fifth issue of the FETP newsletter. In this issue, the focus was placed on the role of FETPs in their response to COVID-19. It contained updates from FETP Afghanistan, Bangladesh FETPV, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi, Sudan Tunisia, and Yemen. The edition highlighted the role of FETPs as first-line responders to the pandemic.

- **EMPHNET Hosts FETP Board of Directors Virtual Meeting**

On November 14, EMPHNET hosted the virtual FETP Board of Directors meeting. The meeting was attended by FETP Directors from the region and their support teams. It featured presentations from each country program in the region. During these presentations, the presenters spoke about their achievements during the last year, the challenges they faced in-light of COVID-19, and the programs' contribution to their country's COVID-19 response efforts.