

Containment of the Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has compelled the national public health authorities to formulate an outbreak response and even take stringent measures to reduce the rate of transmission of the disease. In the Eastern Mediterranean region, a cumulative total of more than 23 million cases and 0.35 million deaths has been reported since the start of the outbreak. In order to flatten the curve of the disease in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the onus is on the national leaders, public health authorities, other stakeholders, and the community. In conclusion, the Eastern Mediterranean region has to up-scale its preparedness and formulate a comprehensive action plan and all this has to happen in an accelerated manner. We have to realize that our window of opportunity is closing very fast and if we don't act now, our health facilities will be overwhelmed and we have to pay the price for the infection in the form of loss of lives of our near and dear ones.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Eastern Mediterranean, Response plan, World Health Organization.

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INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has compelled the national public health authorities to formulate an outbreak response and even take stringent measures to reduce the rate of transmission of the disease.¹ However, the incidence of the disease continues to rise and the caseload has increased to over 760 million confirmed cases and over 6.8 million deaths as of 12 March 2023, on the global front.² The present estimates clearly suggest that the European region has been hit hardest by the novel virus infection. These estimates are quite alarming keeping in mind that there is a potential risk of the health system being overwhelmed due to a sudden upsurge in cases and that there is no potential cure or effective vaccine yet available for the disease.^{1,2}

Eastern Mediterranean Region: COVID-19 Estimates

In the Eastern Mediterranean region, a cumulative total of more than 23 million cases and 0.35 million deaths has been reported since the start of the outbreak.² Even though the proportion of detected cases or reported deaths appears less, it is worth noting that so many people have lost their lives to the novel virus infection. The positive sign is that in excess of 22 million people have recovered from the infection.²

Containment of COVID-19 Infection

It is a fact that nations like China and South Korea have succeeded in flattening the curve of the disease, but for that to happen in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the onus will be on the national leaders, public health authorities, other stakeholders, and the community.³ The effective containment of the infection will essentially require outbreak readiness and formulation of an emergency response plan in the nation. These activities will essentially include an active search for cases, capacity building of laboratories for promoting early case detection, adequate infrastructure for ensuring isolation of cases and treatment of the confirmed cases, strict adherence to the infection prevention and control measures, contact tracing for

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identification of all potential cases, restricting unnecessary travel, and the establishment of a risk communication mechanism and community engagement activities.^{3–5}

All these are active strategies and they have to be strictly coupled with measures for social distancing as the disease is predominantly transmitted by close contact and through droplets.^{1,3} In addition, steps have been taken to sensitize all the healthcare personnel about the different aspects of the prevention and control of the disease.⁶ Further, some governments have already imposed nationwide lockdowns and also implemented measures to reduce social gatherings, close of educational institutions, and compelled people to work from home. Further, steps have to be taken to ensure that facilities for quarantine and clinical evaluation practices for travelers at the point of entry should be upscaled.^{4,5} Moreover, the logistic supply chain management needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that the supply of all the essential personal protective equipment is maintained.⁴ The ultimate aim of these measures is to ensure that the nations don't land up in community transmission.^{1,4,5,7}

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Eastern Mediterranean region has to up-scale its preparedness and formulate a comprehensive action plan and

all this has to happen in an accelerated manner. We have to realize that our window of opportunity is closing very fast and if we don't act now, our health facilities will be overwhelmed and we have to pay the price for the infection in the form of loss of lives of our near and dear ones.

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