

Coronavirus in Syria

26 March 2020

This report monitors the spread of coronavirus in Syria on a weekly basis in Syria, and covers the period from 19 to 26 March 2020.

First - Spread of the virus in Syria:

It was officially announced that five cases of Coronavirus were recorded, with reports of many confirmed cases without any official confirmation. The authorities continued to try and find out other people who had come into contact with those infected with the virus.

In Azaz, Aleppo countryside, news was reported of the death of one of the patients who was said to have been infected with the Coronavirus, but without any official confirmation. There are 3 coronavirus cases suspected in Khirbet Al-Joz in the countryside of Idlib.

Likewise, no cases have been officially recorded in the Northeastern regions of Syria.

Second - preventive measures taken:

With the first confirmed cases recorded, the local authorities began taking a number of measures, including:

- A curfew was officially announced by the Ministry of the Interior of the Syrian government and the suspension of working hours for all schools, government departments, restaurants, and commercial stores. Likewise, the Self-Administration issued a circular requesting a curfew from citizens and closed all places of gatherings.

However, in the Northwestern regions of Syria, no official circulars were issued for the curfew, and some areas only contented with issuing calls through mosques to quarantine at homes.

- All Syrian government hospital doctors have been asked to prepare for response to the epidemic and all their leaves and travel plans have been suspended within Syria as a response measure in the event of an outbreak.

- The sterilization of governmental bodies and departments began in the areas of the Syrian government, and street sterilization in the city of Raqqa, Der Ezzor and Hassaka.
- Der Ezzor Health Committee allocated 3 emergency phone numbers.
- The administration of Nowruz camp in North Derek has suspended visits and exits of the displaced, except in emergency campaigns, all activities, community gatherings, and shut schools until further notice as a precautionary measure.
- The announcement of the provision of spaces for quarantine by the Syrian government, and the Self-Management and management of some hospitals in Aleppo countryside and Idlib.
- On the same day, the management of the Bab Al-Hawa crossing took precautionary measures, as body temperatures were examined for workers transporting goods and day laborers carrying out portage.
- The popular market held every Tuesday in Atma was suspended (on the 24th of March) until further notice.
- ACU organization in coordination with the Ministry of Health in the Syrian interim government, provided 3 test kits to test the virus, which is sufficient to test 800 patients.
- Tightened procedures at the Der Ballout crossing, where people were seen wearing muzzles and gloves at the checkpoint. All those travelling through the checkpoint were also examined and searched - their names were recorded, and they were told that they could not exit the city once they have entered, except for employees in some sectors.
- Greater precautions have been taken in the Children and Women's Hospital, including wearing protective clothing, distributing muzzles, and sterilizing the hands of the women and men patients at the hospital checkpoint. Muzzles and hand sanitizers were distributed to all those accompanying children to the hospital and they were also instructed to sanitize their hands every two hours from the whole. The hospital suspended their outpatient work, except for difficult and emergency cases.
- Civil organizations and teams have started working on awareness-raising activities regarding the seriousness of the disease and how to prevent it.

Despite these preparations:

- The medical facilities for dealing with HIV patients are still very modest, including quarantine places for people suspected to be infected with the

coronavirus, and Red Crescent teams have not been provided with any protective equipment or tools.

There is a shortage of sterilization materials and the emergence of fake disinfecting supplies on the market causing poisoning and health damage in northeastern Syria. There is also a shortage of muzzles and other medical supplies needed to prevent virus in the Eastern countryside of Der Ezzor.

- There was little commitment by Syrians towards following preventive measures, that began to change with the official announcement of the registration of the first cases, and the announcement of a curfew by the authorities, which stirred caution in citizens to stay home.
- The regions of the Northwest remain the most susceptible areas for the spread of the virus due to the high population density, with approximately 4 million people, half of whom are displaced persons who live in shared housing, as well as a million and a half who live in camps.
- There is a pervasive misinformation and private healthcare workers providing services for fees.

Third - the problems created by the spread of the virus on the social level:

- There are homeless people, daily workers, and working children who are forced out of the house every day and cannot afford the financial burden of quarantine. The same applies to the tenants of the shops and homes who have to work in order to pay the rents, otherwise they will be required to evacuate.
- There is an increase in the prices of vegetables and other food items which weakens the purchasing power of the economically marginalized population mainly due to the recent collapse of the Syrian pound and the disruption of economy in Syria, as well as pressure in some areas on stocking up on food due to public panic and fear.
- There is a high price in medical supplies, especially sterilizers, muzzles, and cloves.