

## CCSD COVID-19 10th Report for Syria

First half of July 2020

The reality in Syria portrays a humanitarian catastrophe, as the COVID-19 virus spreads rapidly across Syria, it hangs on the curtail of a country that has been exhausted by more than 9 years of conflict.

The tenth report monitors the movement of the virus outbreak in Syria during the first half of July 2020, and the measures taken to confront it, based on monitoring of the authoritative actors in each region. This will examine the situation of civilians in each area reported on.

### **Northwest Syria**

Approximately five million Syrians, nearly half of whom live in IDP camps, face the dangers of the rapidly spreading COVID-19 virus. The first record of infections was among medical staff at Bab Al-Hawa Hospital on July 9, 2020, which resulted in a set of measures that the Syrian Interim Government implemented in the region, closing down the hospital, quarantining the medical staff, reviewing all patients who made visits to the hospital during the same period, and asking them to conduct a precautionary quarantine for two weeks. All non-urgent medical examinations were also suspended for a week, between July 10, 2020 and July 17, 2020.

On July 10, two new cases were reported and it was two doctors whom contracted the virus while working in several hospitals and were in contact with the first case that was reported. Because of this, the Syrian Interim Government, stated by the Minister of Health, Maram Al-Sheikh approved the quarantining of two hospitals; Azaz National Hospital and the Hand Hospital which specializes in women and children in Atma. The Free Idlib Health Ministry also took samples from those who were reported with positive cases of COVID-19 and made three ready-made isolation centers in Idlib, and 15 of 30 centers were recently equipped with essential preventative tools such as sanitary kits.

On July 11, 2020, the results of the examination samples for the Bab al-Hawa Hospital staff showed that everyone was not infected with COVID-19 and that 105 out of 160 were positive. The Support Coordination Unit in the Idlib Governorate announced that the number of infections increased to 4, where technicians working with the Operations Ambulance teams had been exposed to those with previous cases.

On July 14, 2020, a fifth case was reported in the Azaz area. A healthcare provider working in the hospital had contracted COVID-19. Three new cases were reported after, reaching a total number to 8 positive cases. A medical source at the Military Hospital in the city of Afrin stated that there are no suspected cases of COVID-19 in the city, and that the rumors are unfounded.

*Local authorities have implemented the following measures which have been reported:*

1. In a statement issued by the Bab al-Hawa crossing, the crossing must be closed to those traveling to and from Turkey who have cold and flu like symptoms between July 7-14, 2020.
2. In areas under the control of the National Army, an emergency meeting of the Crisis Unit was called to organize an emergency plan and on the same day, the Education Directorate suspended all formal and informal educational activities and courses established under the Olive Branch by organizations working with the Education Directorate until further notice.
3. The local council in both Azaz and Al-Bab, east of Aleppo, issued a decision to close public parks to prevent gatherings and to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The phone number: 0090 555 17171 76 was provided to the public as a hotline to answer inquiries about the virus or in the event of feeling any health disorder or any of the symptoms of infection with the virus.

### **Civil Society organizations:**

Civil Society organizations are working to sanitize and sterilize public facilities and spaces in Idlib committing to preventative measures and supporting health awareness to the public regarding COVID-19. One worker of a civil society organization said:

***“Sterilization takes place before entering the center, gloves and a mask are worn. The sterilization of centers has become essential at the beginning and at the end of work hours to protect everyone. The vans carrying the employees are sterilized in addition to the children (their hands), and the children's seats are sterilized periodically daily.”***

Other organizations have provided water supplies and other types of support like distributing water tanks and chlorine. They have also added public awareness sessions and physical infrastructure like added washrooms for beneficiaries to use.

One of the facilitators in a childhood center said:

***“since the spread of the COVID-19, it has been directed to follow preventive measures, but we were not fully complying with the instructions, thinking that the virus was far from us. But after the appearance of the first case, we became more committed to the instructions, and no woman is allowed to enter the center without wearing a mask and sterilizing their hands. For the awareness sessions within the center, we reduced the number of beneficiaries participating in the physical session, and ensured that the women beneficiaries were separated by a distance of one and a half meters”.***

A worker from a women's empowerment center said:

***“We have been asked to continue working from home. The country director in Turkey has refused to work from online and wants to be in person wearing gloves and has instructed many of us to work in person and from home. We have been instructed to sanitize and sterilize ourselves and everywhere around us every hour in addition to wearing a mask. We have also been asked to not receive or invite beneficiaries to our centers, and stressed that the centers be thoroughly cleaned every day.”***

### **The general trend of the population around the virus:**

The measures currently taken by the general public do not meet the necessary COVID-19 protection measures in densely-populated areas, which already suffers from widespread poverty. The absence of the minimum purchasing power to obtain sterilization and sanitation materials and protective masks exacerbate the problem of attaining the appropriate and necessary materials for the everyday person.

There have also been a spread of misinformation and rumors among communities after the first announcement of infections. This misinformation and is based on the little information that the local population receives about the virus and the changing local policies.

Maryam from the Al-Karama camp, a ninth-grade student commented on her classmate's situation and said:

***" I told my parents in a panic about my classmate Nada. About how the school authorities took her to a quarantine center because they suspected that she had the Corona virus. I followed my classmate's case through communication with her and others. My Neighbors and my family are nervous about mixing with her family, even at a distance because they don't want to contract the Corona Virus. After Nada came out of quarantine, she was unable to take our scheduled health science exam. She was also unable to make up the exam because her father could not pay the \$20 USD needed to apply or the supplementary course. The entire year of her studies went down the drain and her life was wasted by the Corona virus."***

Um Muhammad, a displaced person from the countryside of Idlib countryside said:

***"I am afraid of greeting anyone when I have a cold, especially after I heard that the number of cases infected with the COVID virus reached one hundred. I sterilize and wash my hands regularly in addition to washing vegetables. If I could sanitize drinking water, I would also do that."***

### **Syrian Regime control areas**

The month of July witnessed an increase in the number of HIV infections at an increasing rate, as the Health Directorate in the Regime-controlled areas recorded that the number of infections in the first half of July (179) cases, bringing the total number of infected people to (458), and the month witnessed the recording of (35) cases of recovery from the virus. This brings the total of those recovering to (140), and the Ministry recorded (13) deaths from the virus, bringing the total deaths to (22). Syrians living in Regime-controlled areas indicate that the number of cases is much greater than the declared cases.

The Ministry of Health has taken some measures to confront the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, including designating the Ibn Rushd Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases and Addiction Treatment in Damascus as an isolation center for positive cases. This center is equipped with 50 beds, and the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Damascus University stated that The Carlton Hotel has also been designated as a quarantine and isolation center for medical

personnel infected or suspected of being infected with COVID-19. The government authorities concerned with the strategy to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic decided to amend the entry requirements for precautionary measures and procedures, so that citizens who hold Syrian nationality and are stuck abroad are allowed to move and enter the border crossings with Lebanon within 18 hours. This 18-hour window would start from the time of conducting a PCR test at the Lebanese hospitals accredited by the Ministry of Health, provided that the returnees are subject to a home quarantine for a period of 5 days. Those who test positive for the COVID-19 virus will be transferred after testing to one of the local isolation centers until they get better and test negative.

A quarantine was imposed on the town of Ras al-Maarrah was monitored, and the Othman bin Affan Mosque, organized by Kafar Sousa in the capital, Damascus, was closed after confirming that two worshipers, and a member of the mosque's muezzin family, were infected with the COVID-19 virus.

Cases of domestic violence are on the rise, a worker in a women's empowerment center in Damascus reported.

***“Cases of domestic violence are increasing, and often cases are not reported until real and physical damage happens. When the balance of power (economic and social) in a relationship is strained, some human beings start using exploitation as a tool to regain that power. This leads to an increase in violence, both psychological and violent. The majority of cases that have been identified are between relatives and families.”***

### **North East Syria**

The Self-Administration did not record any case of infection during the reporting period in the first half of July. The Self-Administration has taken precautionary measures, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in the Regime-controlled areas. The Self-Administration has issued a decision that all border crossings will be closed as of July 13, 2020 and students are excluded from the decision until the exam period ends, and only humanitarian cases are entered and subject to quarantine for a period 14 days. It also decided to prevent the entry of funerals for the dead due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to continue maintain social distancing. They have also directed residents to maintain social distancing in places of worship, mourning tents, weddings and other large gatherings.

The Democratic Civil Administration for the Tabqa region also issued a circular message prohibiting the holding of parties of all kinds, whether social, weddings, or even birthdays, except after approval and obtaining a party license issued by the Technical and Cultural Follow-up Office in Tabqa.

In the province of Raqqa, the Health Committee and the Administration of the National Hospital in Raqqa denied what was reported about the presence of an injury in Raqqa National Hospital which led to the closure of the hospital. Instead, the Health Committee announced that it had tightened its precautionary measures in the medical centers, medical points and hospitals that it directly supervises in the city of Raqqa. This was to support and supplement the preventive measures recently announced by the Self-Administration to prevent the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

The People's Municipality in Raqqa called on all suppliers of materials (food, chemicals, detergents) to periodically visit the municipality's central laboratory to obtain a laboratory test certificate or no objection.

The Raqqa Civil Council (Presidency of the Health Committee) issued the following decisions regarding the procedures and measures to follow regarding COVID-19 and on July 5, 2020 the following decisions were made:

1. Preventing gatherings, celebrations, weddings and funeral tents in the areas of the Raqqa Civil Council in order to preserve public health;
2. Preventing group prayers in places of worship;
3. Preventing gatherings in public parks and all, closing cafes, cafeterias and restaurants, and limiting their work to external requests;
4. Emphasis on commitment to working hours and shifts in all hospitals and health centers;
5. Adherence to the rules for preventing the spread of infection (social distancing and means of preventing infection) in medical clinics, restaurants, and closed places.

The Educational Guidance Office of the Education Committee in Raqqa stated that schools will be opened this year before the usual date to compensate for the scientific losses that resulted from the Corona pandemic.

#### Arabic News articles related to COVID-19 in Syria:

1. <http://www.shaam.org/news/syria-news/منسقو-الاستجابة-عدد-سكان-الشمال-السوري-المحرر-بلغ-4703846-نسمة-بينهم-1674918-نازح-ومهجر-قسري.html>
2. <https://www.jisrturk.com/بيان-اغلاق-معبر-باب-الهوى-على-الحدود-ا/>
3. <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiNTA0NWZmYtMDJiMC00ZWU0LTIINTktZTViZjYwYThjZmUzliwidCI6ImY2MTBiMGI3LWJkMiQtNGl3OS04MTBiLTNkYzI4MGFmYjU5MCIsmMiOjh9>
4. <https://smartnews-agency.com/ar/wires/2020-03-19-الادارة-الذاتية-في-الطبقة-تعلم-ايقاف-الحفلات-كاجراء-احتراسي-ل-19-03-2020>