

CCSD COVID-19 12th Report for Syria August 15, 2020

Local authorities across Syria expect that August and September will see an explosion of COVID-19 cases and have issued calls and appeals for support to contain the spread of the virus at all levels, local, national and international. Isolations in both the North east and North west regions of the country will most likely not succeed in limiting the spread of the epidemic because of high poverty rates, limited access to preventative materials, and scarcity of financial resources to stop working. In areas controlled by the Syrian regime, there is almost a complete absence of preventative measures and local policies except for minimal compliance to WHO guidelines.

The twelfth report monitors the movement of the virus outbreak in the various regions of Syria and the measures taken to confront it, during the first half of August, in addition to monitoring the reality of the civil response to COVID-19 needs.

Syrian Regime controlled areas:

The first half of August witnessed a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 infections despite regime held areas and the Ministry of Health recording numbers of infections that do not correspond to the size of the outbreak according to civilians. The official number of infections was recorded was 836 bringing the total number of infected people to 1593. There have been 171 reported cases of recovery from the virus, bringing the total recoveries to 408. There have been 17 recorded deaths from the virus, bringing the total recorded deaths to 60.

Most of the testimonies coming from regime-controlled areas indicate that Damascus has a high number of COVID-19 casualties, especially since the lifting of most preventive measures and policies. Also, people have not been committed to social distancing which has further exacerbated the situation.

Official news received from popular media sources has focused on the government's failure to take measures to protect the medical teams which has resulted in a number of deaths of doctors in Syria due to COVID-19. 61 doctors to date, including 37 doctors in Damascus have passed away from the virus.

Syrian Regime measures taken to respond to COVID-19:

- The Awqaf Ministry announces the suspension of congregational prayers in the mosques of Damascus and the countryside of Damascus, starting on August 3 for a period of 15 days.
- The Ministry of Health asks concerned authorities to ensure that hookahs are not introduced or being used in public places.
- Relocating the PCR examination center to Al-Jalaa Sports City, due to the overcrowding of the previously identified centers, starting on August 13th.

- The governmental team concerned with the strategy to deal with the COVID-19 epidemic decides to operate two flights per week from the Damascus International Airport, starting from Saturday, corresponding to August 22, 2020 to return Syrians stranded abroad while adhering to preventive measures. Arrivals will stay at Ebla Hotel until the results of the Corona test analysis (PCR) are issued.
- The School Health Directorate at the Ministry of Education developed an integrated plan for students to return to school that include a set of procedures that were worked on with the Ministry of Health.

The return to school procedures include:

1. *Schools are completely sterilized;*
2. *A committee should be formed in each governorate headed by the Director of Education with membership from local stakeholders that make decisions on school health, school buildings and administrative affairs.*
3. *Carrying out a thorough inspection campaign for all schools, making an inventory of all deficiencies, maintaining or replacing out-of-service public facilities, and setting a budget for issues related to COVID-19 protection.*
4. *School Health has established efficient and quick daily procedures in the event that a case of Covid-19 is discovered within the school.*
5. *The return of schools on September 1, 2020 is subject to the situational analysis of the outbreak and the capabilities in the country to be able to manage the spread. The date of returning schools may change depending on the decided analysis and the recommendations of the Ministry of Health.*
6. *A health supervisor will be placed in each school whose task is to supervise the health conditions and the physical environment and inspect cleaning tools, drinking water, public facilities, and sick absences in the school.*
7. *Any infection that is confirmed for any student, will be quarantined at home, and the class will be closed for five days, sterilized, and students will be monitored.*
8. *There will be a clinical analysis from the Ministry of Health for infections numbers, and if the infections exceed 5%, the school will be closed and sterilized for a period of 15 days and after the period of 15 days, students can return to school.*
9. *Schools will be flexible and lenient with students by giving sick and rest days to students, teachers and administrators as needed.*

Some are skeptical of the school procedures and S.T said:

"Certainly, none of these measures will be implemented or followed. I hope that they postpone the opening of schools for several months until there is a real and measurable reduction for the spread of the epidemic. For me, I will not allow my children to go to school."

There has been an increase in deaths because of the Syrian regime's inability to carry out burial procedures with respect to preventative health measures and social distancing, forcing people to bury people on their own in semi-secret conditions without announcing the funeral until after the physical burial has taken place.

The economic and social situation and the opinions of the people:

- The economic situation continues to deteriorate as small businesses and established businesses have collapsed, and have almost completely stopped. For example restaurants and cafeterias, and construction works has decreased as people are not frequenting due to social distancing.
- A new group of a poor class has been created, who were once seen as average, but due to the lack of work, people have lost their savings such as gold and real-estate in order to secure their daily sustenance. Their situation has become similar to those who have become displaced before the COVID-19 crisis emerged.
- The government has continued to close many money exchange companies under the pretext that they dealt illegally with foreign remittances, which has affected a large number of civilians who were dependent on what their expatriate sons sent abroad through remittances. The government system seeks to limit the companies that transfer money to Syria to the companies that adhere to the exchange rate set by the central bank, which is much lower than the real exchange rate.

The public mood:

There is fear in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Lattakia and Homs about the massive spread of the virus; because of the clear increase in the number of deaths in Damascus and its countryside. Although there is general despair, people are no longer afraid of the Corona virus because they feel that they do not have the ability to control the situation. A simple example is that a mask is 300 Syrian pounds and for some, this is an expensive cost. Society also mocks those who wear the mask making it difficult to feel comfortable.

(M.M) says:

“The situation in Syria today is the worst that it has been in ten years. Poverty, fear, destruction, violence, siege, rampant corruption in all sectors, and an interruption of medicine and electricity can be seen everywhere. In my neighborhood, a man hits his wife on a daily basis, and on the day, we did not hear her screaming, it turned out that he killed her and the two babies she was carrying.”

Northwest Syria

The risk of an outbreak of the Coronavirus in the northwest in Syria has increased. There have been 51 cases until 8/15/2020 and the number of recoveries rose to 39 cases. The casualties were concentrated in: Al-Rahi, Al-Bab, Sarmada, Taftanaz, Akhtar, Afrin, Bab Al-Salama camp, Darat Azza, Soran, and Azaz.

The Syria emergency response coordinators issued a statement on the spread of the virus in the camps that expressed that they were rapidly increasing in danger. They emphasized that the camps have greatly entered the stage of danger after recording the infections, and warned of their significant expansion and the inability to control the spread due to the lack of capabilities necessary to confront the virus. The situation in the camps suffer from a lack of services, overcrowding, and a lack of sanitary and protective standards. On August 3, 2020, the Minister of Health in the Syrian Interim Government confirmed that, in the last two days, new clusters of cases appeared, which means the start of the fourth outbreak of the disease. He indicated that he expects the number of cases will increase, and that what raises more

fear, based on the reports of the community awareness campaigns, that there is no social and legal commitment to social distancing policies and the lack of preventive measures.

Official procedures for the camps include:

- Establishing an isolation tent at each door of a medical center. In the tent, the team sterilizes the hands of those entering the centers and distributes some masks.
- The quarantine of the city of Sarmin has been lifted, as civil teams have opened the main and secondary roads leading to town, and have disinfected and sterilized public and vital facilities to prevent the threat of the spread of the virus.
- On August 7, the quarantine was applied to a house in the town of Abyan Samaan in the western countryside of Aleppo, due to a suspected case of infection from someone coming from the regime-held areas.
- A temporarily quarantine was held on the Armanaz Hospital and its medical staff. This was due to a suspected infection of a patient attending the hospital.
- Phone number hotlines have been put into service by the Syrian Interim Government through the notice issued to residents of Bab al-Salameh camps +905313549826 - +905389506723
- The Syrian Interim Government issued Resolution No. 30 containing the measures taken in northwestern Syria to address the outbreak of the Coronavirus, in which they affirm a set of measures, namely:

Article 1: Emphasizing the continued closure of the internal crossing points to protect society.

Article 2: It is mandatory to wear a mask in public places and there will be a penalty if there is a violation of this rule.

Article 3: Forcing visitors to restaurants, cafes and public parks to abide by the rules of social distancing and to maintain a distance of one and a half meters between people in markets and restaurants, and to ensure the implementation of the preventive measures issued by the health directorates, the ministry, and the health authorities.

Article 4: Obliging employees in government departments, vendors in markets and bazaars, workers who work in collective places (crowded places), and people coming to shop, to adhere to the rules of social distancing by a distance of one and a half meters.

Article 5: Leave a distance of 3 meters between each stall in shopping places and bazaars, and the buyer delivers the goods without touching them, while obliging the owner of the store to wear gloves when delivering the products to customers.

Article 6: It is prohibitive to hold meetings and collective gatherings, with an emphasis on postponing wedding activities (parties) until further notice.

Article 7: Reporting suspected cases on the hotlines provided by the Ministry of Health.

Article 8: Prohibition of leaving homes for those over the age of 60, and for those suffering from chronic diseases, unless there is an urgent case.

Article 9: Adherence to the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health and its directorates regarding methods of infection prevention.

Article 10: Not to visit medical centers, hospitals, and dispensaries, except in emergency cases.

Article 11: Assigning the National Army and Internal Security Forces to implement the precautionary measures issued by the Ministry of Health.

Article 12: Taking the necessary measures by the local council and law enforcers in the main streets and alleys, including closing some roads, reducing and controlling traffic.

Article 13: The Ministry of Health in the Syrian Interim Government will provide masks for free and in installments.

A consignment of sterilizers and medicines provided to the Free Aleppo Health Directorate was delivered from the SRTF.

It should be noted, despite the widespread of the Corona virus in several regions in the northwest, the people do not adhere to the preventive measures, as crowding exists and people are not following the advice of social distancing. Wedding parties and crowding at markets have continued.

Hajj Qassem said that he was visiting his son in the city of Azaz and during his visit he was invited to a wedding. He went to the wedding and was surprised that there were more than 500 people in the same hall who did not take preventive measures. He commented that if the disease was really present, this gathering would not have been possible, and the local authorities would have forbidden such weddings of course.

In addition to the lack of care of many, Abu Yazan said:

“During the distribution of relief in an area of the western countryside of Aleppo, when people were instructed to do social distancing, especially after discovering a case in their village, the people standing in the queue started kissing each other to defy our advice.”

The general mood of the residents: People are frustrated with the continuing cases of people smuggling between regions, which increase casualties according to some residents. Aisha, a resident of the city of Darat Azza, said:

“Their cousin came by smuggling into the city of Darat Azza to marry her son. After she married her son she shook hands with everyone at the wedding and at the bazaar. She began to show signs of illness, and after taking a swab from her it turned out that she was infected with the virus. She should not have come in a normal manner, she should have been placed in quarantine. Now by being smuggled, she has transmitted the virus to so many people, as if poverty is not sufficient for them, they also want to add illness!”

Khaled, a displaced person from Kafr Sajnah, a 15-year-old breadwinner for his family, had another opinion about the virus and the procedures. He said:

“I had an appointment at the medical center in Atma. When I arrived, the guard told me that I could only enter if I wore a mask and told me I should buy a mask and go in. To be honest, I don't have the money to buy a mask. I work all day for 2000 Syrian

pounds and the price for the mask is 300 Syrian pounds. Although the guard is right, I wasn't able to purchase the mask, the appointment passed, and I was not able to enter the medical point, even though I am sick. The hospital should give us masks if we don't have one or the ability to purchase one!"

Northeast Syria:

This region includes: Hassakeh, Deir Ezzor, Raqqa and Aleppo, and are under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Hassakeh:

Two deaths were recorded in the Qamishli and al-Shahba regions, and 11 new cases of the new Corona virus (8M/3F) and were distributed in Al-jazeera (6), Kobani (3) and Al-Shahba (2) according to the statistics of the Health Authority on the Al-jazeera. The total number of recoveries has reached to 17. It is reported that, with the announcement of these new cases, 182 cases and ten deaths have been reported in total. News was also circulated about two infections among the Kurdish Red Crescent workers in Al-Hol camp, but the Red Crescent denied registering the cases.

The Health Authority of the Self-Administration announced that it expects that in late August there would be a significant increase of COVID-19 cases in north eastern Syria. A curfew is planned to delay the date of rapid increase.

Official procedures:

- The Self-Administration of Northeast Syria issued a statement announcing the imposition of a general curfew within its areas of influence, as a measure to confront the threat of the Corona virus spreading throughout the Syrian territories. Patrols came out in Derek / Al-Malikiyah calling on the people to abide by the ban, which came into effect on 6/8/2020. The Self-Administration had announced that 16,000 members of the Internal Security Forces would be distributed in the regions of the Al-jazeera to monitor the curfew.
- The Self-Administration carried out sterilization campaigns in most of the cities of Al-jazeera, and the municipalities in the region have also launched a campaign of signs and lines and points to stand in front of bread stalls to ensure social distancing under the ban. The health office of the people's municipality in Dirk started a campaign to distribute medical masks in the city's market to meat shops.
- The Women's Office of the Municipality of Shaab, Derek, carried out a campaign to distribute coronavirus awareness brochures within the city, the content of which is to avoid shaking hands and maintain safe distance and social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus, and brochures have also been published in public places and the main market of the city in order to educate citizens.
- The Transport Directorate has allocated and operated a number of internal transport buses within the city. In order to serve students during the exam period, the Transportation Directorate, in coordination with the provincial health authority and the municipality's health committee, sterilizes these buses and fully adheres to preventive measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic, and these buses only

operate on the line of the College of Agriculture, Science, Arts, and Economics (civil engineering).

- On Saturday August 15, 2020, the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese issued a decision to close churches to worshippers after the outbreak of the Corona virus in the region.
- The Health Authority issued a decision requiring all clinics and hospitals to take protective measures, sterilize places and tools, and prevent visits.

It also lifted the ban on a building in the Al-Arbouya neighborhood, south of Qamishli, about 10 days after it was imposed, due to a suspected case of infection with the Coronavirus among one of its residents.

It also converted the intensive care department, which was out of service, and the outpatient department at Al Shaab Hospital in Derek / Al-Malikiyah to a special suite to receive 16 cases for care and 21 beds for the intermediate case suite, after preparing them and isolating them from the rest of the hospital and placing them directly under service. The Health Authority in the Euphrates Region has transformed the Shahid Hawker School in the city of Kobani into a quarantine center to receive Corona patients, and the new health center contains 65 beds, a room for intensive care, in addition to a room for imaging and an analysis center. And to contain the center's medical supplies.

- The joint presidency of the municipality of Terbesbiye / Al-Qahtaniyah decided to form a committee in the district of Terbesbiye to properly bury the deceased if the cause of their death was the Corona virus, and a sterilization committee.

The Vice-President of the Joint Presidency of the Health Authority in Al-Jazeera region also stated that the number of hospitals and medical centers in the region is insufficient in the event of an increase in cases of Coronavirus in the region.

Economic situation and mood:

At the beginning, the ban witnessed recklessness in most cities, but the security forces (Asayish) took more stringent measures to compel people to the ban. Activists published pictures of people gathering in front of bread stalls and gas distributors, before the Self-Administration took the initiative to draw the circles of organizing the queue and safety in front of them.

The economic situation continues to affect large sectors of the governorate's population, C.M. said:

"My work stopped completely after the ban, and although my colleagues are barbers who go to people's home and continue their work for customers, my fear of getting sick doesn't allow me to take the risk and therefor I bear the loss of income."

A.M. who works in a clothing store said:

"If my summer goods are not able to sell during this period, I will have to store them and face a loss, in addition to the already daily loss I have of closing of the shop where I am forced to pay the monthly rent of 600,000 Syrian pounds which is equivalent to \$300 USD. he pays"

Raqqa:

The governorate of Raqqa recorded 4 cases of the virus, and one recorded death August 11. The Civil Council issued a circular requiring the imposition of a quarantine on the city of "Al-Tabqa" in the countryside of Raqqa for fourteen days, as a precautionary measure for the spread of the virus. This was followed by the imposition of a complete curfew as a precaution to confront the threat of an outbreak of the Coronavirus.

The Local Administration Committee, Municipalities and the Municipality of Shaab in Raqqa launched a campaign to sterilize and spray sterilizers in public places, markets and parks. The co-chair of the Education Committee in the Al-Tabqa issued a decision to suspend the work of private and public institutes and kindergartens affiliated with the Education Committee as part of precautionary measures to prevent Coronavirus and preserve the safety of students.

With cooperation and coordination between the Health Committee of the Raqqa Civil Council and the Medical Organization, the quarantine center was opened in the Al-Nahda neighborhood in Raqqa. The center contains 37 treatment beds and is equipped with halls for patients and those suspected of being infected with Coronavirus. It can handle isolation and spacing and the ability to sterilize special clothes and bathrooms equipped for each private room for patients on each floor. There are private rooms and bathrooms for people with special needs, Mine victims, and amputees. The medical staff of the center consists of 5 specialized doctors, 20 nurses, and 10 technicians, and the medical staff in the health center works within the 8-hour shift system for each staff, so that the center remains open in the event of responding to an emergency.

Joan Al-Thakhira, the administrative officer in charge of heading the Health Committee of the Raqqa Civil Council, confirmed the readiness of the Quarantine Center in Raqqa to respond to any case of suspicion or isolation, and a special phone number was assigned to contact and a special team to take samples to test suspects with infection over a 24-hour period.

A hospital in Ain Issa district opened a special section for quarantine as a precautionary measure to deal with suspected cases of Coronavirus, and the quarantine department in Ain Issa district includes 5 rooms, each containing 3 beds, supervised by a medical staff consisting of 4 doctors, 8 nurses, an anesthetist, a laboratory worker, a driver, 4 cleaners, and a reception worker. This hospital has also circulated a special phone number to report suspected cases.

The economic situation in the governorate:

The economic effects of the outbreak of the epidemic are still present and affect large sectors, as the ban has negatively affected the economic situation of the city. The majority of the city's residents live on daily occupations (day laborers).

A.K., the owner of a popular restaurant in Raqqa, said:

“My business has been damaged due to the ban imposed on the city. There has been an accumulation of food that was not purchased which is wasteful and was not considered when the ban was imposed. I incurred huge losses due to intermittent power cuts in addition to travel bans. I could not travel to buy equipment for the restaurant.”

M.A. added: *"The administration's decision is a step towards limiting the spread of the virus, but they need a review of some articles and focus on other areas too, especially the decisions regarding crossings with regime areas."*

Deir Ezzor Governorate:

No decision was issued to place a ban in Deir Ezzor, despite the Health Authority's announcement that there were 8 confirmed cases in Deir Ezzor, but it was confirmed that all cases are subject to quarantine and medical monitoring. An official call was directed to the organizations active on the ground to provide some preventive supplies, including sterilizers, detergents, gloves, masks, oxygen cylinders, sprinklers, medical teams' suits, and thermometers.

Epidemic precautionary measures:

The Health Committee of the Deir Ezzor Civil Council carried out sterilization campaigns that included official buildings and institutions and distributed masks to employees, and also worked to alert residents and shopkeepers to the need to wear masks and not gather for more than 3 people.

The Al-Kasra Hospital was provided with an oxygen station with a capacity of 20 cylinders to be put into service, according to Ibrahim Amin, a specialist in the oxygen stations department in Al-Jazeera region, who is the installation technician. The quarantine building was equipped in anticipation of any emergency, in accordance with the instructions of the Civil Administration in Deir Ezzor.

It was observed that the families did not adhere to the instructions to wear masks and social distance, and markets and commercial stores are operating in their normal form, and social visits were not interrupted.

Civil response to the outbreak of the pandemic:

In the areas of the Syrian regime: Mainly in Damascus, a civil initiative called "Aqamha" (Sterility) was launched that works to help civilians by providing doctors for patients, medicine and necessary medical supplies to them. This includes providing oxygen cylinders and oxygen regulating devices for people with shortness of breath. In As-Sweida, many organizations have distributed hand sanitizers to residents and awareness-raising activities on the symptoms of the virus and its transmission mechanisms continued on social media. Requests for phone numbers of doctors treating symptoms of Coronavirus has been distributed because of the lack of space in hospitals.

In the regions of northwestern Syria: The organizations continued awareness campaigns about the dangers of the virus within their programs, with an emphasis on the implementation of security, safety and virus prevention measures by their employees. Civil defense teams in Idlib and Aleppo also continued their work in sterilizing public facilities and camps. Other associations continued to deliver relief to homes, with sterilizing hands and sticking papers on the aid kit, including the symptoms of the virus and how to prevent it.

In the regions of northeastern Syria: Civil organizations in Hassakeh have worked on awareness-raising campaigns on social media sites on how to prevent the virus, and other organizations have undertaken publishing infection data and distributing it in the Self Administration regions and updating it periodically. Other organizations have launched

awareness campaigns in Al-Hol camp and distributed brochures and sterilizers. In the governorates of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, the organizations operating in the governorate have included the rules of social and spatial distancing in their activities including awareness campaigns with distribution of brochures, holding awareness seminars. Some organizations have made safety circles in gathering places, encouraging adherence to procedures, and preventing the establishment of physical activities.