

I.R. Iran Incident Management Team

Quarterly Report No. 6

April-June 2023



**World Health
Organization**

Islamic Republic of Iran

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
IMT	Incident Management Team
MoHME	Ministry of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran
OCR	Outbreak and Crisis Response
WCO	World Health Organization Country Office in the Islamic Republic of Iran
WHO	World Health Organization

Background

Following the fifteenth meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on 4 May 2023, the WHO Director-General determined COVID-19 as an established and ongoing health issue that no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern. However, since the COVID-19 risk has not been eliminated, the vulnerable populations to keep observing precautionary measures.

In the second quarter of 2023, although the trends for new cases and admissions were downward, the number of deaths increased compared with the previous quarter. This increase can be attributed to the high case load in the previous quarter. Fig. 1 shows the overall COVID-19 situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran from 19 February 2020 to 30 June 2023.

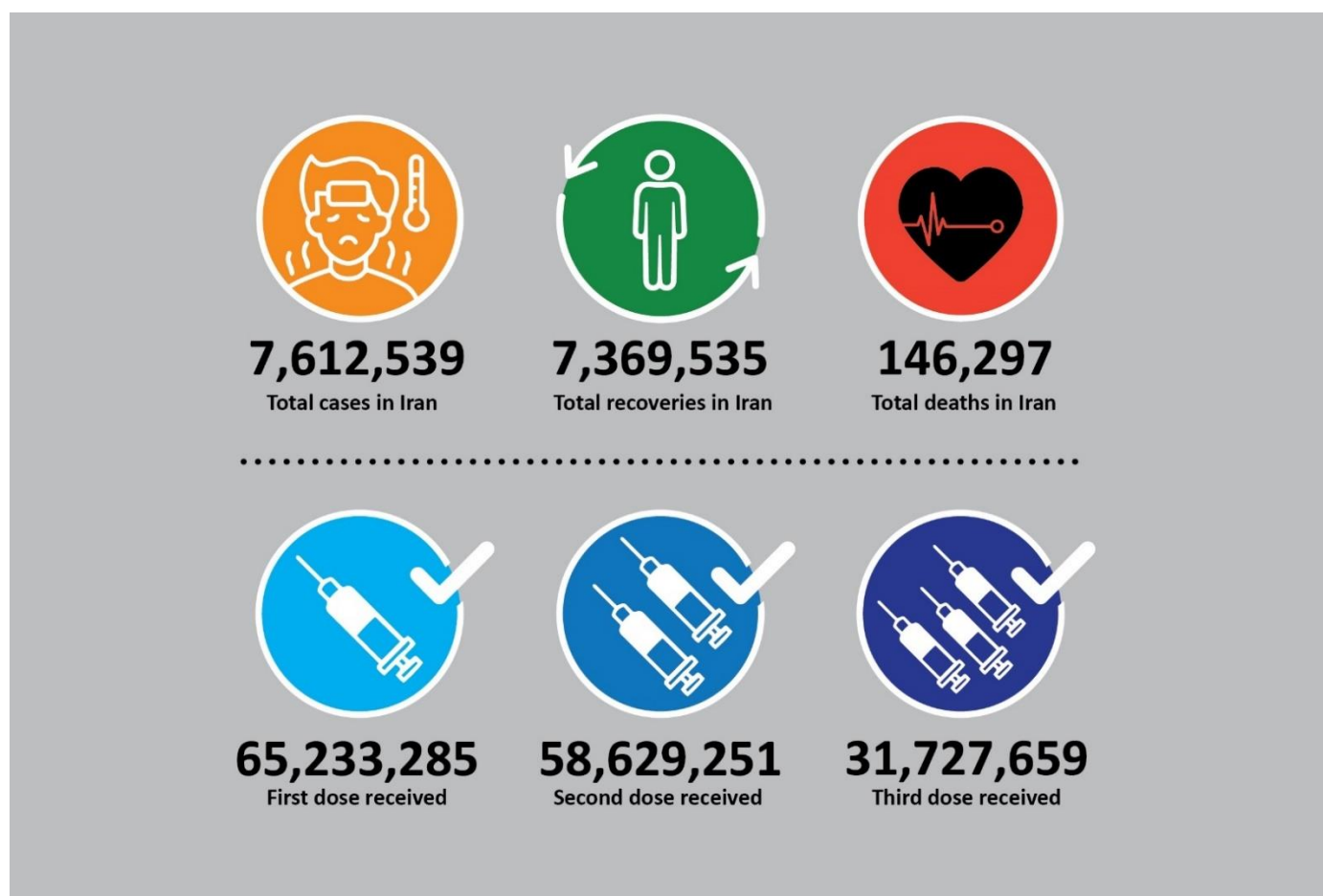


Fig. 1. COVID-19 situation in I.R. Iran from 19 February 2020 to 30 June 2023

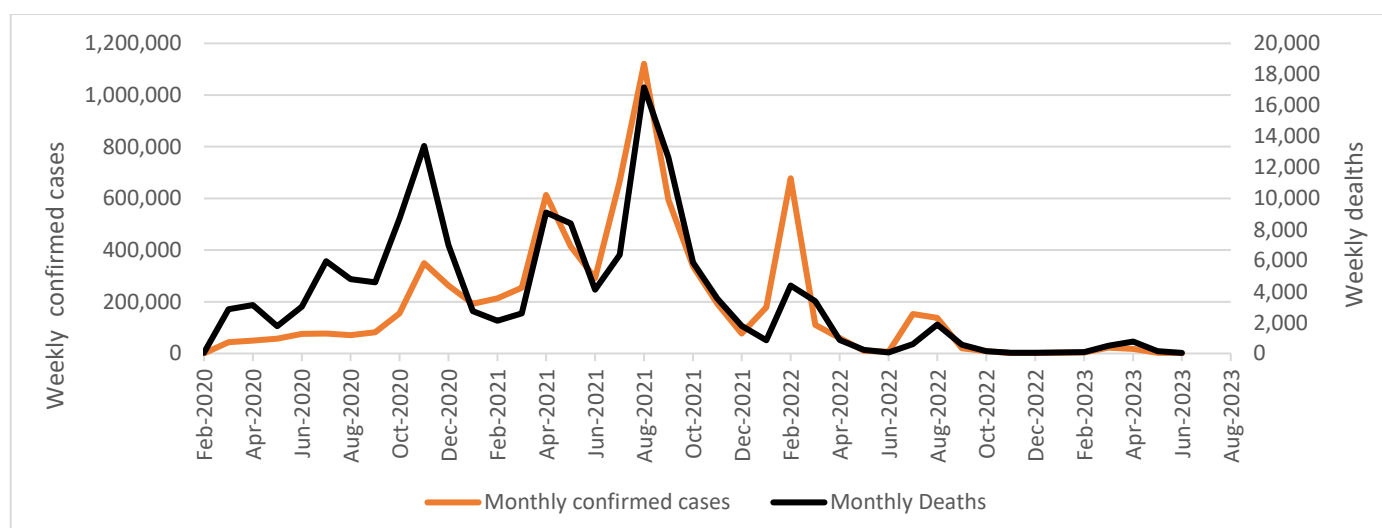


Fig. 2. Monthly trend of COVID-19 cases and deaths from February 2020 to 30 June 2023

Table 1 compares the numbers for new cases, deaths, hospital admissions, and the cumulative total vaccine doses administered between the two quarters.

Table 1. COVID-19 situation in I.R. Iran, comparison of the first and second quarters of 2023

Quarterly Period	New cases	New admissions to hospitals	New deaths	Total Vaccination
2023, 1st Quarter Jan – Mar 2023	29 579	14 953	663	155 494 446
2023, 2nd Quarter Apr – Jun 2023	21 820	11 844	949	155 590 195
% change	26% ↓	20% ↓	43% ↑	0.06% ↑

Legend: ↑ and ↓ denote an increase and ↓ denotes a decrease

The Incident Management Team strategic support

Following expansion of the scope of the work of the Incident Management Team (IMT) since the third quarter of 2022 to cover other public health events in addition to COVID-19, the IMT focused more on objectives of Pillar 9 of COVID-19 Strategic Response Plan to maintain and strengthen essential health services and systems. This strategic modification was made to enable the World Health Organization Country Office (WCO) to support the needs and priorities of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME). Moreover, with the COVID-19 situation subsiding considerably in the country, there is now a need to strengthen health system components that received little attention during the pandemic. To promote the health system's resilience, the WCO has expanded its areas of support and interventions to other priority areas. It has mobilized funds to provide public health and humanitarian assistance to refugees and vulnerable populations in the country.

Quarterly highlights and achievements

Major activities

Provision of malaria rapid diagnostic tests

Malaria is a life-threatening disease that spreads to humans through mosquito bites. Prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of malaria reduce disease, prevent deaths, and contribute to reducing transmission. The Global Malaria Programme has considered Iran as one of the 25 identified countries under the E-2025 initiative – an initiative aimed at halting the transmission of malaria in 25 identified countries by 2025. In this regard, the IMT Iran supported the procurement of 100 000 malaria rapid diagnostic tests to strengthen early detection of cases especially among most vulnerable populations and refugees.



Fig. 3. WHO staff overseeing the unloading of the shipment of malaria diagnostic kits. © WCO Iran

In addition, other items including insecticide-treated nets, various insecticides and larvicides, thermal foggers, insecticide spraying pumps, and entomological baits were procured with the support of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and donated to the MoHME for strengthening vector control and malaria prevention and treatment.

These items have been delivered to the MoHME on May 2023 and are currently being distributed to be used in Sistan & Baluchistan, Hormozgan, Kerman, and South Khorasan provinces.

Completion of activities on improving access to inclusive health care in long-term care facilities and enhancing the quality of life and dignity of the most vulnerable population in Iran throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

As part of a joint project co-funded by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), WCO, and the Government of Canada, and in close collaboration with the Government of I.R. Iran, over 7000 older persons and people living with disabilities in 30 long-term care facilities in 13 provinces have now access to standard respiratory isolation rooms. To achieve this, WCO led an evidence-informed and participatory process for needs assessment, development of guidelines and standards, preparedness assessment, procurement, delivery of equipment, and monitoring and evaluation throughout project implementation. In addition to the spatial modifications for isolation function, safety, and comfort, each isolation room is equipped with an air purifier, an oxygen concentrator, an autoclave, a hospital bed, a thermometer, a pulse oximeter, wheelchairs, and walkers, among other assistive care devices. In addition, an industrial washing machine was installed in each facility.



Fig. 4. Mr Stefan Priesner, the UN Resident Coordinator; Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain, WHO Representative in IR Iran; and officials of Pakdasht County visiting the isolation room at Pedarbozorg long-term care facility, Pakdasht, Tehran. © WCO Iran



Fig. 5. A person with a spinal cord injury receiving a tailored package of health-related and hygienic consumables from Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain at the Association for Protection of People Living with Spinal Cord Disabilities. © WCO Iran

In this project, 120 people with severe disabilities due to spinal cord injuries who were of poor socioeconomic status were provided with personalized and urgent hygiene supplies for two months. Provision of such supplies for this vulnerable population particularly affects this community's resilience in post-COVID recovery by increasing access to supplies and eventually supporting their socioeconomic resilience.



Fig. 6. Examples of the established standard isolation rooms. © WCO Iran

Provision of six MRI machines

During the second quarter of 2023, one of the IMT's projects for strengthening the health system, namely, the provision of six MRI machines to six hospitals in different provinces of the country, overcame the most challenging milestones. So far in this project, five out of six MRI machines have arrived in the country. They have been delivered to Kousar hospital in Semnan province, Hajar hospital in Chaharmahal & Bakhtiar province, Imam Ali hospital in Khuzestan province, and 12 Farvardin and Pasteur hospitals in Kerman province. While the installation process of the delivered machines is in process, the sixth machine is expected to arrive in the country in early July 2023, and will be delivered to Shohada hospital in Fars province.

The progress of this project was a significant achievement for the IMT because there were several complexities in international procurement, customs clearance, and direct shipment of such sophisticated medical devices to the recipient sites. The success of this project is one of the best examples of collaborative work between the WCO and other levels of the Organization, in particular, the WHO Centre for Health Development in Kobe, Japan, the donor (the Government of Japan), and MoHME, as well as other concerned governmental organizations.



Fig. 7. Unloading of MRI machine at Kousar hospital in Semnan, Semnan Province. © WCO Iran



Fig. 8. Installation of MRI machine at Imam Ali hospital in Andimeshk, Khuzestan province. © WCO Iran

Complete list of activities

The IMT has continued the implementation of activities listed in Table 2 from the previous quarters, as well as initiating new activities during the reporting quarter (April–June 2023). The following activities are funded through financial contributions of the Central Emergency Response Fund, the One UN Impact Fund, Russian Federation, and the Government of Japan.

Table 2. Progress report on IMT's complete list of activities under Outbreak and Crisis Response (OCR) pillars, as of 30 June 2023

OCR Pillar	Subject	Main Objective	Area of Intervention	Activity Description	Progress (As of 31 March)
1	Management Meetings	Coordinating between pillars	Functional country office IMT core group meetings		Meetings: 5 Total: 54 Reports: 1 Total: 6
5	Afghan refugee influx/ Communicable disease detection	Enhancing diagnostic capacity of laboratory network	Provision of diagnostic kits	Procurement of cholera culture reagents	75%
9	COVID-19	Strengthening the diagnostic capacities in the country	Supporting the development of national medical imaging capacity	International procurement, delivery, and installation of 6 MRI machines in Kerman, Semnan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, and Fars provinces	75%
	COVID-19	Addressing the needs of those suffering from disabilities and their families and caregivers	Supporting the development of self-care educational packages for people with disabilities	Providing training and capacity building support to people suffering from disabilities and their families and caregivers	75%

OCR Pillar	Subject	Main Objective	Area of Intervention	Activity Description	Progress (As of 31 March)
9	COVID-19/Afghan refugee influx	Providing timely access to life-saving essential health services in vulnerable provinces hosting refugees	Increasing access to public health facilities for essential health services for life-threatening emergencies in S&B province	Procurement of 16 mobile sonography transducers to S&B province.	75%
	Afghan refugee influx	Enhancing pre-hospital emergency services in vulnerable provinces	Provision of medical equipment/vehicles	Procurement of 4 type B ambulances	75 %
		Providing timely access to life-saving essential health services in vulnerable provinces hosting refugees	Increasing access to public health facilities for essential health services and life-saving interventions in S&B province	Procurement of 2 mobile clinics	25%
				Procurement of 1 mobile laboratory/portable laboratory machine	25%
				Procurement of 5 motorcycles.	50%
				Procurement of 4000 Sets of childbirth supplies is needed for maternity facilities	75%
				Procurement of 4000 Sets of childbirth supplies for maternity facilities	
				Installation and utilization of telemedicine software and hardware devices in hospitals and PHC/mobile clinics to provide access to essential health services for a defined population.	50%
	Afghan refugee influx	Enhancing the provision of psychosocial support	Provision of psychosocial and rehabilitation support in the S&B province	Procurement of assistive technologies, identified through a needs assessment to support persons living with severe disabilities	25%
	Khoy earthquake	Supporting emergency response	Enhancing Khoy University of Medical Sciences capacity for treating trauma victims of the Khoy earthquake	First round of support: procurement of trauma and emergency surgery kits, 2 automated external defibrillators, and 2 ventilators	75%
				Second round of support: Procurement of ultrasonography machines, gynecologic examination beds, automated external defibrillators including pads, mechanical ventilators	50%
	Afghan refugee influx/ Communicable disease detection and control	Enhancing diagnostic capacity of laboratory network	Provision of hepatitis diagnostic kits	Procurement of 30 000 hepatitis B and 30 000 hepatitis C kits	50%
	Communicable disease detection and control	Supporting malaria elimination program	Provision of screening tests and insecticides to S&B and Hormozgan provinces	Procurement of 100 000 tests for malaria rapid diagnostic test kits	100%
	Afghan refugee influx/vaccination coverage study in refugee communities	Outbreak prediction & prevention	Risk assessment and immunization gap analysis	Conducting a survey in provinces with high refugee communities	25%

Risk communication and awareness raising

The Communications Unit, in close collaboration with the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) and other technical units of the WCO, has designed, created, and published 25 posts with the purpose of health promotion, risk communication and public health awareness raising. These posts include World Hand Hygiene Day, World Malaria Day, World Blood Donor Day, Word Immunization Week, World No Tobacco Day, Skin-Related Neglected Tropical Disease, antibiotic use, World Road Safety Day, and other subjects in line with the communication strategy and IMT's overall Risk communication and community engagement plan. Fig. 9 is a collage of the posts published on WCO's social media platforms from 1 April to 30 Jun 2023.



Fig. 9. Posts published on WCO's social media platforms from 1 April to 30 Jun 2023

Resource mobilization

In the reporting quarter, IMT's proposal on "Preparedness and response to public health emergencies to mitigate multi-hazards among refugee populations in Iran" was accepted for funding by the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). This 18-month project started on 1 June 2023 and with a budget of more than US\$ 1 million will fund activities to enhance capacities and functions of health facilities including outreach services for early action and to strengthen disaster preparedness addressing multi-hazards through the early warning system.

During the second quarter of 2023, also to further support the affected areas in East Azerbaijan province because of an earthquake near Khoy in January 2023, WCO and several other United Nations (UN) agencies with support of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in Iran, mobilized additional funds through the One UN Impact Fund. The funds will be used for provision of emergency medical equipment to support the health facilities that were accommodating earthquake-affected patients in Khoy.

IMT challenges

Receiving required data and background information from the MoHME about the current situation and needs of the health system has been an ongoing challenge and a time-consuming process for the IMT. Moreover, aligning provincial needs of the end users and MoHME's priorities at the headquarters level adds to this challenge. Nonetheless, IMT always approaches the MoHME and WCO's counterparts to learn about their needs and explore new fields to support as well as proposing possible areas of intervention considering the local needs and international funding opportunities.

Another challenge for IMT's activities is the sanctions and embargoes, affecting international procurement of medical equipment. In addition, the lengthy administrative procedure of the MoHME and other local organizations prolongs the process of international procurements. While the usual process is relatively straightforward for the procurement of medicines and medical supplies, there are more complexities with the procurement of medical equipment, especially medical vehicles, and sophisticated devices like MRI machines.

Procurement, shipment, and customs clearance of ambulances are examples of such complications, resulting in a long process until final delivery to the end user. Nonetheless, in every case which WCO could expedite the process, the available capacities were utilized through coordination and pre-arrangements with relevant local organizations. As a result of such effective arrangements, the IMT managed to overcome significant challenges about customs formalities for direct shipment of six MRI machines upon unloading at the airport in Tehran to the six recipient hospitals in five provinces of the country. WCO works closely with MoHME and affiliated organizations to develop its operational capacities for similar future projects.



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